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THE PRECIPICE

MRS. PEARL GROVES MADDON.

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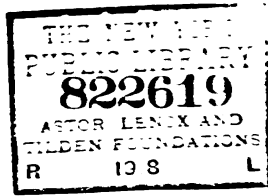
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THE PRECIPICE

CHAPTER I.

In her room on the second floor of a select boarding house, in one of the fashionable streets in the city of Atlanta, Mrs. Doris Chastain, wife of Gerald Chastain, and Mary Gardner, a colored washer-woman who had brought home the week's laundry, stood one bright morning in May.

"I'se jest got to have the money when I brings de close home, Mis' Chastain, or I has to quit," said Mary in a half-angry voice. "My rent I has to pay once a week an' I has to pay cash for every bite de chilluns an' me gets to eat," continued the old woman.

"I am so sorry, Mary, but Mr. Chastain left me with but little change and I've had to use that," Doris replied. "He was not to be gone but a few days and, as usual, has been detained nearly two weeks. I'm looking for him at any time; then, I assure you, I will get the money for you," Doris continued.

The old negress, mumbling to herself, left the room to come back on the morrow.

Doris, left alone, almost collapsed. How many such ordeals had she been through? Money, money, money. What was the use to try to work? None. She threw herself across her bed and gave vent to the feelings that were choking

her. What could she do to get Gerald to give her an allowance to cover household expenses? Three years of married life, living in two rooms furnished for light housekeeping! If the next fifty years were to be as the past three, it would be merciful for her to die now. Owing to Mr. Chastain's absence, sometimes for two and three months at a time, he preferred this way of living to a cottage by themselves. They were fortunate in getting rooms with Mrs. Amanda Jermain, the proprietress of the house.

No children had come to bless the union of Doris Graves and Gerald Chastain. Nearly three years ago, Gerald Chastain, a handsome man of thirty-nine years, with his big, beautiful brown eyes, very high forehead, erect, military figure, and possessing the art of knowing how and when to wear clothes, caught a glimpse of Doris in one of the largest downtown department stores, where she was one of the salesladies. Doris Graves, an orphan since early infancy, having to make her living, and at the close of the day having to go to a small, ill-furnished cottage and spend the nights with her cross, crabbed old uncle, quickly became infatuated with handsome Gerald Chastain. Doris was a rather pretty girl, of nearly eighteen summers. Her eyes were big, open, and blue, her hair a waving mass of brown. No paint had ever marred the lovely bloom in her cheeks. A full, little figure of about one hun-

dred and ten pounds; truly, she was enough to win any man's admiration.

Gerald had an extra good position as traveling salesman for one of Atlanta's oldest and most reliable manufacturing establishments. This company furnished him with a high-class roadster. Riding around in this car, wearing a large diamond ring and scarf pin, dressed in perfect fitting clothes, it did not take him long to persuade Doris that her only road to happiness lay in being made Mrs. Gerald Chastain at an early date. A few days previous to their marriage he had confessed to Doris that there had been a Mrs. Gerald Chastain No. 1, in Virginia. They had been divorced and she had died a number of months ago. He succeeded in making Doris believe that wife No. 1 had been everything that was false and untrue. Living in a city where many divorces were granted every month, Doris did not regard a divorce as immoral or disgraceful.

Soon after their marriage, Doris had an awakening. Where were the beautiful dresses promised her? Where was the costly furnished cottage? Doris had absolutely no voice whatever in what they had to eat. She could not purchase her wearing apparel and she had no spending money. She was allowed to run an account with a little grocery on the corner, the bills being subject to a rigid examination by Gerald the first

of the month. All items that Gerald considered unnecessary had to be eliminated in the future. The laundry bills, et cetera, had to wait until he came in so that he could personally settle them. All the articles that Doris could wash and iron in her room she did, to prevent friction. Time and time again, she had had to borrow money from Mrs. Jermain to pay for little things she could not dispense with. No woman with a particle of self-respect wished to be placed in such a position. Did Gerald do this because of lack of funds? No. It was his close, domineering way, and Doris had come to the conclusion that it had caused the separation between himself and his first wife.

As his expenses were furnished by his employer, it would seem that he cared little how Doris fared.

He had the best on the road. His penuriousness had grated so much on her that she had repeatedly asked him to let her resume her old position downtown; but to all her entreaties, he had turned a deaf ear and would tell her that he was perfectly able to support her, that she was never satisfied, and that it would take a millionaire to supply her wants. All this Doris knew to be false, and she was deeply hurt.

Finally, they had become so estranged that she had asked him to give her a divorce. This infuriated him to such an extent that he swore

she should never have a divorce. She was his. He was going to keep her. Doris had now become fully convinced that Gerald's treatment of his first wife had been the cause of their trouble.

At times, when he was so abusive to her, she would tell him that there must be something radically wrong with him as he could not live peaceably with either of his two wives. Once, after she had made this remark, he had become so furious that he struck her with his hand across her face. That blow killed all love and respect for him, and life now was only a living hell. It would have been much better for them to have separated than to live such a life. Doris, with her sensitive, refined disposition, could not bear to seek a divorce unless Gerald would give it to her willingly. She had no one to whom to turn for help or advice. All these thoughts came to her as she lay sobbing on her bed. Undecided as to her future, Doris arose, dried her eyes, and cooked a light meal.

There was an average of from twelve to fifteen regular boarders in the house, only a few having rooms there. All had good positions in downtown offices. There were five rooms on one side of the hall; two night telephone operators occupied the two back bedrooms, and a young physician, Dr. Eugene Stratham, formerly of Louisiana, occupied the bedroom across the hall from Doris. He had occupied this room for about three

months. He always left early and came home late; therefore, Doris had never spoken to him. She had never seen him but a few times, but had been favorably impressed. He was above the average man in height, had a fair complexion, big, honest blue eyes, light hair, high, intelligent forehead, and was always clean-shaved. He was about twenty-six years old and had the appearance of a quiet, refined, intelligent young man. He was not what you would call handsome. He dressed neatly and in good taste. His face showed no signs of dissipation. He owned a good car and had a negro chauffeur. He seemed to be in good circumstances.

Sometimes Doris would hear him humming or whistling some familiar air as he moved about in his room, and that would make her lonesome. Often she wished they could talk to each other. He seldom ever came up to his room at noon.

After eating her dinner, Doris felt so depressed that she could not remain shut up in her room any longer. Washing the tear-stains from her face and dabbing on a little powder, she opened her door to go downstairs. Dr. Stratham's door opened at the same time and he came out, hat and gloves in hand, ready for the street. Confused, Doris turned and started back into her room. Quickly intercepting her intentions and determining not to be outdone, he hastily remarked:

"Pardon my apparent intrusion, Mrs. Chastain; but surely, living just a few feet apart, we should be on speaking terms." Then, with a winning smile, he extended his hand. Doris could not resist the extended hand, and, with a poor attempt at a smile, bravely replied:

"Yes, I have often seen you, but had come to the conclusion we might possibly never speak to each other."

He had been laid up all the morning with a severe headache, and, unknown to Doris, had unintentionally heard part of the conversation that took place between Doris and the old negro woman. With a glance, he took in the flushed face and the swollen eyes, and he knew she had been weeping. He wanted to help her. Various little remarks had been wafted to him downstairs among the boarders about the life Doris had to live. His intentions were good. He would run the risk of displeasing her, yet he hoped that she would take it as he meant it.

"I could not help hearing part of what the old woman said to you this morning and if you will allow me—" He spoke earnestly, but the hurt, startled expression on her face cut him short for a second. Not to be outdone, he waved aside her feeble protest and continued:

"I would be glad to make you a loan of \$5, or more, so you can settle with the old negro, and, on your husband's return, you can repay me."

He spoke pleadingly as he noticed the tears which she was trying hard to keep back.

"Oh, no, Dr. Stratham. I could not think of such a thing. I am sorry that you heard Mary. Mr. Chastain will be home tonight, I'm sure, and then I will be all right." She spoke bravely. "Thank you for your kindness. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," he answered, gravely. Bowing and drawing on his gloves, he turned and went down the stairs, while she entered her room. He was angry at his helplessness. This was not the first time he had heard the old negro woman asking for her money. He also had a pretty clear conception of the life Gerald and Doris led, for several times he had heard fragments of quarrels between them.

Doris was deeply ashamed and humiliated that any one should know of her straightened circumstances. She spent the rest of the afternoon crying one minute and furiously angry the next. Furthermore, she resolved that Gerald should make her an allowance, no matter how small the amount, or she would leave him at once.

CHAPTER II.

Gerald came home late that afternoon. On his way home he stopped in a market and purchased a nice little steak and a few other delicacies, enough to satisfy his appetite until he went out the next afternoon. Doris prepared a tempting supper. She was a good cook. She refrained from mentioning monetary matters until just before his departure next afternoon, hoping that he would mention the subject and supply her with needs until his return. All preparations were completed for him to leave the house in a few minutes, to be absent for five weeks or longer, yet not a sign nor a word of leaving her any money. Swelling with indignation and her eyes filling with tears, Doris blurted out:

"Aren't you going to leave any money?"

"Hell!" he exclaimed. "What do you need money for now? You get all the groceries you need at S—, on the corner, and you don't need any clothes."

"Clothes!" she mocked. "No, I don't need any clothes. To hear you talk, I don't need anything. I rip, turn, and dye my old dresses. I patch and patch my gloves, hose, and underwear, and skimp and save to make a decent appearance when I am so fortunate as to be honored with

your presence when we go out. I wash and iron all the pieces I can here in the room to save the wash bill. I starve for the lack of nourishing food because I can't get things at that two-for-a-nickel grocery. And you," she taunted, "you live on the fat of the land. I never go to a matinee, moving-picture show, nor any other place of amusement, for you never leave me with enough to pay carfare, much less anything else. You—you—," she stuttered, "prance all over the state, eat palatable food, wear the best of clothes and—" Here the tears got the best of her and she completely broke down. Any man with a particle of feeling would have been touched, but it only angered him. He indulged in a torrent of abuse.

"You have no business going to matinees and moving pictures," he sneered. "A wife's place is at home when her husband is not with her, and, as for the clothes you need, I will attend to that the same as I have in the past."

"I owe Mary for three weeks' washing now and, if I don't pay her this afternoon, she will not wash any more. For God's sake," she pleaded, "don't leave me as you have been doing. Give me a monthly allowance, no matter how small. Show confidence in me. Treat me like a wife and not as a negro servant. You are able to, and you know it," she cried out in despair.

"Damn it, I could not make enough money to

supply you. I will not do anything of the kind." Thrusting his hands in his pockets, he drew out a \$5 bill, and throwing it to her said: "Here is \$5; that will run you till I get back. Mind you, don't get smart and run up the grocery bill." With this parting shot, he darted out of the room. Not a kiss, not a kind word—such was their parting.

Doris, left alone, staggered to a chair by the table. She bowed her head and wept in silence. Old Mary came in and found her thus.

"What's de matter, honey?" she questioned in fear.

"Nothing, Mary, I just reckon I got the dumps," bravely trying to smile. "Here is your money. Go and get this bill changed for me, please," handing Mary the bill, "and, when you get back, I will pay you your \$3."

As Mary turned to leave the room, she said: "Honey, don't you worry no more about de washing. I will never quit until yo' tells me to." Mary had an idea what was worrying Doris.

Mary had come and gone again. Doris tried to straighten up her rooms. She felt ill. Night drew near. She could not stay up any longer. Her strength had left her. Undressing and slipping into her nightgown, leaving her clothing scattered over the floor, she crawled into bed. She felt hot, dry, feverish, yet she would not call any one. She would feel better after she rested

awhile; then she would get up and straighten her room. Five long weeks to stay there again, alone. Crying, she drifted into unconsciousness.

Dr. Stratham coming in quietly about eleven o'clock, slipped off his coat, cuffs, collar, and tie, put on slippers, got his magazine, and sat down in his easy chair to enjoy his pipe and the latest story. Several times during the next hour he thought he heard moans but paid no attention. A long moan. He quietly opened his door and looked cautiously up and down the hall. He did not see anything. The house was in complete darkness. He knew the two telephone operators were supposed to be at their work, hence the noise could not come from that direction. He and the Chastains were the only occupants of this floor. He remembered hearing at the supper table that Mr. Chastain was off on another long trip, also hearing Mrs. Jermain say that Doris appeared ill. A few seconds of suspense. Another moan. It came from Doris' room. In a second he was at her door, gently knocking. No response. He turned the knob. The door opened. He quickly and quietly entered. Groping his way around he stumbled over a chair. Another moan. He struck a match and turned on the gas. Such a shock. Doris lay face downward on the floor, one hand spattered with blood; a broken glass and water pitcher turned over lay by her side. He feared she was dead

or dying. A thrill of horror crept up and down his spine.

One step, and he was kneeling by her side. He felt her pulse. It was quick, strong; she was burning with fever. Then he knew that, in her thirst, she had to find some water; being too weak, she had fallen, breaking the glass, and then had fainted. Quickly raising her in his arms, he placed her in bed carefully, drawing the covers up over her. Going hurriedly to his room, he got fever powders and an ice water bag. He gave her a powder and turned, going into her tiny kitchen in search of ice. He found a tiny refrigerator and a very small piece of ice which, hastily cracking, he put into the ice water bag, and placed it on her burning forehead. From then until daylight he watched alone by her bedside. Once he left her side for a few seconds and picked up her clothes strewn on the floor. He noticed the neat patches on her underwear, he saw the hand-made articles adorning the walls, dresser, table, such things as all refined, gentle women love to make.

Once, in her restlessness, she partly threw the covers back, disclosing her beautiful white shoulders and part of her white, rounded breast. Such a sight very few men would have resisted; not so with him. Somehow this woman in her misery and helplessness appealed deeply to him. She was sacred to him. He knew such

a sight was not intended for him, and he would not take advantage of her unconsciousness. He rose quickly and, bending over her carefully, drew up the ribbon in her night dress, tying it snugly up close around her throat, and carefully tucking the sheet up over her arms.

As he watched by her bedside a wicked thought entered his head. The tempter said: "Take this woman for your wife. She needs you. You can make her love you. In this day and time, what does divorcing amount to?" The memory of his sacred mother, dead now many years ago, came before him, as did her early teachings. She would rather have seen him dead than be guilty of such action. The thought vanished as quickly as it came. He thrust the tempter aside saying to himself: "God forbid that I should be guilty of such a crime."

He tried to think, but he seemed to be under a spell. They were close together, and there was not much light in the room. He felt that the shadow of something unknown was around them both—that somewhere in the room a sweet flower was growing, and not like other flowers. The solitude was sweet, even though she was unconscious.

Very gently he lifted one of her hands and looked at it curiously—this small, white hand so perfectly smooth—this unsullied little hand that never an instant would relax its grasp on the

white simplicity surrounding her—here in this dim, fragrant world of hers, called her room.

And here throughout the days and nights to come that were to hold sacred all that he cared for upon this earth he gave himself to her, without a word, without a hope, as he kept the midnight vigil, alone, by the side of her unconscious body, hoping, praying that this was not the end.

As daylight was breaking, she began to arouse. Her fever was cooling and he hoped it would not return. He had decided that perhaps this attack had been brought about by some terrible disturbance with Gerald.

Placing his hand on her forehead, he smoothed back the mass of waving brown hair. She opened her big blue eyes in amazement; for a second she could not say anything, so great was her astonishment at seeing him bending over her.

"Mrs. Chastain, can't you speak?" he questioned softly.

"What is the matter? What are you doing in here?" came in tones of anguish as she tried to rise in bed. One hand flew to her head, she felt the ice water bag slipping off. He gently and quickly pushed her back down on the pillow. One glance, and she took in the situation. Now she understood. Before he could reply to her questions, she said:

"Oh, I see now. I've been ill. How stupid of me. What happened to me?"

He told all that had happened since he came into the room.

"Why didn't you call Mrs. Jermain?" she questioned.

"I did not know what brought on this attack and thought best to wait until you were able to be consulted," he answered truthfully. "You know how people are prone to talk. You see I felt sure something disagreeable happened to you yesterday afternoon which you would not care for the public to know. That is why I did not call any one."

"Thank you," she murmured gratefully. "I am glad you did not. I will be all right now."

"Yes, you only need rest and to be kept quiet for a few days. Now, don't object," patting her hands and being rewarded with a wan smile. "I am going to take charge of you until you have fully recovered, and in the meantime, see that you take a full course of medicine."

"Oh, I don't want to do that," she said childishly.

"Nevertheless, you are my patient now, and you will have to take it." He smiled as he told her this.

"I will see you again tonight. Now, mind, you are to stay in bed today, take your medicine, and rest.

With several parting instructions, he quietly and quickly left the room.

Left alone, Doris gave herself up to the thoughts of the past twenty-four hours. How good it felt to have some one take an interest in her. How much pleasure it is to have some one to go to with her joys, cares, sorrows, and troubles and share them. She felt that Dr. Stratham was this kind of man.

Mrs. Jermain, a little alarmed at not seeing Doris that morning, came into the room. It worried the good old woman ever so much to see Doris lying in bed, looking so ill and worn. She busied herself about the room, doing little things to add to Doris' comfort. Doris told her not to be alarmed, that she had medicine from Dr. Stratham, and this relieved the good woman. Mrs. Jermain loved Doris and her heart had ached many times at the things she had seen and heard about the way Gerald treated her. Throughout the day she made several trips upstairs to see how Doris was getting along. She told Doris to keep her door unlocked, as long as she remained ill, so in case of necessity any one could get in without trouble.

CHAPTER III.

Along about nine o'clock that evening a faint knock sounded on the door. Doris, thinking it was Mrs. Jermain, called: "Come in."

Dr. Stratham entered the room swiftly and quietly. The gas was burning low. Doris was terribly surprised. She remembered he said he would see her again tonight, but, after it became late, she concluded he did not think it necessary to come. She quickly drew the sheet up around her neck. He took this in at a glance. With his habitual professional air, he turned up the light and crossed the room to her side, bending over her and quietly scrutinizing her. He was greatly relieved at finding her so much improved.

His presence excited her, made her cheeks flush. She wished he would go.

His heart beat so fast that he was afraid she would hear it. Throughout the day his thoughts had been of her. He had tried to banish them but it was useless. To hide his pleasure at being by her side, he hurriedly began telling her of amusing incidents that happened downtown that day, the latest news in the papers, finally telling her all about his childhood days, the death of his father and mother, and of his life up to the present.

Thus interested, they both forgot their embarrassment and failed to note how the time had flown. Looking at his watch, he jumped up in surprise.

"What is it?" she questioned.

He did not answer.

"What time is it?" she asked again.

"Don't ask me," he said; "it is one o'clock."

"Oh," she exclaimed. But he had left the room.

She could not help but smile as she thought of the look on his face when he saw how late it was. How the time had flown. She did not know when she had spent such pleasant hours, yet it concerned her to know he had stayed in her room so late.

She was up the greater part of the next day. She felt weak, but managed to get her work done. So, many times throughout the day, she would think of Dr. Stratham and feel just a little bit sorry that there was no excuse for him to see her that night. Five weeks to spend alone! How she wished she could go out driving with Dr. Stratham, go to the theatre, and such places. But such things were not to be dreamed of.

At the close of the day the two telephone operators dropped in to see how she was getting on and Mrs. Jermain came in for the second time. After this the house became quiet for the night and Doris, in sheer loneliness, went to bed.

She thought of the last two nights and their pleasures. That was ended. Every unpleasant thing in her life came before her. She cried until she was really ill again. Just as soon as she was strong enough she would seek employment. She would firmly inform Gerald that she was done with him. He could get a divorce if he wanted to. What did it matter? She would go where she would never see Gerald nor -Dr. Stratham again.

If she continued to live in Atlanta, who would care whether she was divorced or not? Were there not hundreds of people all around her getting a divorce, or wanting one? Yet somehow she shuddered at the idea. Finally, her thoughts became more normal. It was not what men said about it, but what would God say? Would there be any credit in it for her? It is a coward who runs. How would she feel in church when the minister preached about the evils of divorce? Would she not be ashamed and hang her head? No, she would not be a quitter, not yet, anyway. "The darkest hour is just before day." Perhaps daylight would come to her after awhile. Thus reassured, she fell asleep.

What was that sound in the room? In a second a match was struck, revealing Dr. Stratham. She partly raised in bed, two plaits of hair hanging down her back. Her whole countenance denoted fear and questioning. He spoke kindly:

"I knocked several times. You did not answer and then I was afraid you were ill again; therefore, I took the privilege of coming in. I'm sorry I frightened you."

"You must not come in here," she cut him short. "I am getting on all right. Please go," she entreated.

"Now, don't get excited," he spoke soothingly. "I will go in a few minutes, and, as for you saying you're getting on all right, why you don't look like it. Been crying, haven't you?" he demanded.

She would not answer his question.

"It must be twelve o'clock, and oh, what if some one were to see you in here at this hour of the night!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, but no one is going to see me in here. There was no one to see me come in and there will be no one to see me go out," he replied, passionately.

"Hurry," she commanded. Something in his eyes made her afraid. She was afraid of herself, too. Would he never go? By this time he had lighted the gas and approached the bed. She fell back on her pillow, almost too excited to breathe. For a second he was afraid she had fainted. He seated himself on the bed by her side and took her unresisting hands in his. Her tongue stuck in her mouth.

"Don't," he pleaded. "I am not going to hurt you. You are not well yet by any means." He had regained his professional air. She felt better now. He asked her if she had taken her medicine, and what she had been doing through the day. She told him all, and ended by telling him how lonesome she had been and of her big cry after going to bed. He then told her of his day's work, of the news about town; finally asking her if she had any plans for the future. Yes, she told him she was going to go back to work if Gerald would let her.

"You are not going to be strong enough to work for several weeks yet; and, in the meantime, you need the services of a physician, so just consider yourself in my care," he said earnestly.

A long-drawn sigh escaped her. "Oh," she murmured to herself, "where will the money ever come from to pay him?"

"I haven't many friends," he said. "My heart is in my work, and you cannot imagine how much pleasure it has been to me to come in here these evenings. You have but few friends and stay cooped up here all day, and why should we deny ourselves these few minutes every evening?" pleadingly.

"Oh, no; you cannot do that. Some one would find it out and then I would be lost, ruined!" she exclaimed in terror.

"Little woman, please don't deny me this," he pleaded as he clasped both her hands in his. "I have already told you once that I shall take good care that no one sees me come in here. These last three nights have been too much for me. You have wound yourself around my heart—"

"Hush!" she exclaimed, as she clasped both hands to her ears.

He regained possession of her hands and held them tightly, continuing: "It is God's truth; and what is worrying me is, how long is it going to take me to get over it," smiling sadly. "If you will just let me come for a little while every night I promise you I will not hurt you. I am not that much of a cad," he said, as he read her thoughts.

He dared not trust himself further. She was a sweet little woman. It took all his will-power to refrain from kissing her good-night. How he longed to press his lips to hers. With a hasty-spoken good-night, he quickly left the room. His eyes were all aglow. He fully intended to treat her right. She was going to trust him. God forbid that he should betray that trust. Just to be with her a few hours every night, to tell her of his troubles and joys for the day. To have her tell him of her thoughts would be all he would ever ask of her. He knew such intimacy was running lots of risk, but he was man enough to stand the test. He would remember

his mother's teachings. He had never been in love. He loved Doris with his whole heart and body. He felt that he could make her care for him, even if she did not already care. What would a man give for such a wife?

CHAPTER IV.

Next day she was able to sit out upon the front verandah upstairs. She looked across the street at ——'s hospital, sanitarium or infirmary, whatever you wish to call it. To sit and watch the stream of people as they came and went from over there, to watch the ambulance roll up, unload its burden of ill or injured; watch the white-capped nurses as they flitted to and fro, had been one of the principal events of her days since she had been with Mrs. Jermain. When she saw all the sufferings she imagined was taking place over in that building, then she would forget her own sorrows. Every morning about nine o'clock the florist's wagon would drive up with its boxes of flowers for the patients, and in her imagination she wondered whom they were for, and how many patients would not get any. Later, the physicians in their big automobiles with their negro chauffeurs, would come, and then friends, relatives, in cars and sometimes on foot, would ascend the steps and be lost to view as the big doors slowly swung to and they wended their way to each loved one. For days she had been watching a middle-aged man, dressed in brown, seedy clothes, an old wide felt hat, as he, alone, ascended the steps each morning and afternoon at the visiting hour. How

well she remembered one afternoon several days before, when she saw him dressed in the same suit and carrying a cheap, faded hand-satchel, and holding a little pale-faced girl by the hand. They hesitated a second at the entrance, and she saw them look at each other as though afraid of the unknown. A little later she saw the man coming out, alone, and with head bent low. The child and hand-satchel were left behind in that big, white building, with its white-capped nurses, internes and physicians. A sob came into Doris' throat, and she longed to go and whisper loving words of comfort and cheer to that little country girl, who, then perhaps, was sobbing her heart out at the loneliness of the big building. As Doris now watched, the man came out again, and Doris knew that the little girl was yet over there.

Another case was that of a little boy, some four or five years of age. His room was on the ground floor, directly across the street facing Doris', and she took it for granted that his parents were wealthy, for often she could see the nurse moving about the room with her arms full of flowers. To her inquiries she learned that the child had pellagra. In the mornings, when the nurse would be bathing him, she would hear his pitiful cries, sometimes so unbearable that she would have to go into her room and bury her head in a pillow to shut out the cries.

Every morning, as she looked across at the child's room, she would see a man sitting by the bed for a few minutes, and always at night he was there until long after she had gone to her room. She knew from the way he would gently lift the child up in his arms, draw the covers up, pat the little fellow's shoulders, and at times gently stoop and press his lips to the child's, that it was not a physician, but the child's father. The child's mother never came. Perhaps she was ill, dead, or worse—perhaps she had ruined her home and gone with another. This last thought was unbearable. Doris could see the cloud hanging over her head.

“Oh, if I had a child, I would have something to save me,” she murmured.

CHAPTER V.

Two weeks had passed. The hour was nearing midnight, and the fire in the grate had burned low. Eugene, with a frown on his face, one elbow resting on the mantel, stood looking down at Doris, who was gazing intently at the fire. Her simple little evening gown, an old one made over, was of palest blue, fashioned on the empire lines, cut a little low at the neck, revealing her rounded, white throat, and tiny, short sleeves, leaving bare her perfectly formed arms. Her waving mass of brown hair was done in a loose coil on the nape of her neck, and her feet were encased in lovely blue silk hose and tiny blue satin pumps, relics of better days.

This vision of her was a delight to Eugene's eyes, yet it seemed to him that Doris always skillfully contrived to keep those tiny satin pumps hid beneath the fold of her skirt. Doris, calm and serene in that same costume, had greeted Eugene every night for two weeks. The love-light shone in her eyes, and the roses bloomed in her cheeks, and health once more reigned supreme. They were running a terrible risk. Public opinion would have condemned them; yet, with all Eugene's love, passion and pleadings, Doris had kept him at his distance. She felt as safe with him there in her room as she

would have been on a crowded public thoroughfare.

Not so Eugene. Little did she know the passion and tumult that was raging in his breast every night as he had left her presence and gone to his room. He had thought of how she had never even allowed him to clasp her hands when saying good-night. He loved her. He wanted her, and he was ready to cast prudence aside. He knew she was not happy with Gerald. He forgot his mother's teachings. He wanted her to get a divorce from Gerald and be his wife. She would not even allow him a lover's privilege. When he had asked her two weeks before to let him come to her room at night and talk with her, then he thought that he would be satisfied. Had she not granted him that request? He was not satisfied. He wanted to hold her in his arms, to press his lips to hers, and have her look into his eyes and whisper words of love. She was a woman of strong will-power. He knew that she loved him, yet, he sometimes believed, she would never yield to him. There had to come an end to those nights, that much he knew. That night a crisis was pending. He had talked, reasoned, pleaded with her in vain. He was not the Eugene of old, but the beast; the passion that was in him was fast gaining possession.

As he stood gazing at her, taking in the beautiful profile, even if it was indiscreet of her to allow these meetings, he thought of her sweetness, purity, and faithfulness to Gerald, though she did not love him. All reason seemed to leave Eugene; his brain was crazed, and he was not responsible for the outcome.

"How much longer are you going to gaze into that fire," he demanded, sullenly.

"Until you can sit down and act like a gentleman," she replied.

"A gentleman," he mocked. "I have been a gentleman for the last two weeks, and what have I gained by it? Perhaps if I act like a devil you will be otherwise—"

"Look here!" she exclaimed, as she arose and stood facing him, "you are going too far. The best thing for you to do is to go to your room at once, and sleep off some things you have said. You appear as though you had had a drink—"

"A drink! No! I have had no drink; but the sight of you, night after night, placid and cool, and facing me as if I was a perfect stranger, is too much for my brain. You are as cold as a block of ice. I cannot see how you can have such perfect control over yourself, when you know I am dying to hold you in my arms, when you know I want you for my wife." Great drops of perspiration shone on his forehead.

She was silent, waiting for him to go. He interpreted her attitude.

"You want me to go, do you? Well, I am not going. You think you can tempt a man and get off safe. You are no single girl to be innocent as to the nature of a man, and you are not going to play with me any longer. You love me and I know it; but you are too proud and stubborn to yield. I have offered you marriage, which is the highest honor a man can bestow on a woman, and you have refused it. Now, I will have one privilege, my rights—that is, to hold you in my arms and kiss you."

She raised her frightened face to his, and moved a step backward. She was afraid of the look she saw in his eyes. She dared not scream or run; that would arouse the house and ruin her; and she knew it was useless to talk to him. Never had she seen him so aroused. Too late, she realized that she had unintentionally been tempting him. She longed to go to his arms and comfort him with words of love, yet her belief in God and the Bible kept her from him. As long as she never let his lips touch hers she was safe, but if she failed, what would be the end? What a temptation! What a precipice! One little sign of weakness in her now and over she would go. How she prayed to God in those few seconds to save her!

As she stepped back from him, Eugene, with one move, had her in his arms, almost crushing the life from her and raining passionate kisses on her lips. She resisted by main force, and managed to extricate one hand, with which she struck him a blow across the mouth. That was the finish. Imprisoning both her hands, and crushing her to him, he murmured:

"Tonight, my proud beauty, I will humble you. I will kiss you until you willingly return my kisses and tell me that you love me," he cried out in anger, while he continued to smother her with his caresses.

Never once did she show signs of yielding. His passion was spent and his brain was cooling. He saw she was on the verge of a collapse and that she was gasping for breath. He realized that she would die before she would yield.

A few seconds more and he had regained his normal sense. He knew what a beast, a brute he had been. He felt as if he would end it all, if he had a gun. He would not let her know that he was sorry or ashamed. She was white unto death, never making a sound nor a murmur, and only the quick rising and falling of her bosom told that she was alive. Now, he longed to take her in his arms, to comfort her, and to tell her he was sorry; yet, he knew for his own sake, he dared not. He had not regained sufficient control over himself for that. Now, the cruel,

demanding, exacting way that he spoke to her was the safest. He quickly went to his room, returning with some liquid medicine in some water.

"Here, take this," he commanded. "You are all in."

She hesitated, and looked appealingly into his apparently angry face.

"It is not going to hurt you. You will be asleep in a few minutes," he roughly replied, as he divined her thoughts.

"Now, I am going to give you Just fifteen minutes to get to bed, and if you don't I am going to call Mrs. Jermain," he said as he knelt down and removed her satin pumps.

Turning, he went to her bed and turned down the covers and carefully placed the pillows.

"Now, remember, I mean that you must be in bed within fifteen minutes," was his parting command as he left the room.

In his room he anxiously listened to hear any sound that came from Doris' room. He was afraid to leave her, yet he dared not stay. She looked so broken and exhausted. He dared not break down before her after the way he had treated her. For her sake, for his, he had to assume that angry, commanding way. For a few minutes not a sound did he hear. What if she did not go to bed? What if she refused to obey him and wandered out on the street? He

cautiously opened his door and listened. Eventually he heard the key turn in her lock, and heard her moving around in her room. A few seconds and the light was out.

“Thank God!” he whispered. “She is safe. That medicine will put her to sleep.” He had suffered the tortures of the damned during those fifteen minutes.

CHAPTER VI.

Morning came. About nine o'clock Doris, dressed for the street, told Mrs. Jermain that she was not feeling very well and thought she would spend the day in the country. She had prepared a light lunch and would take that with her.

"Do go, Mrs. Chastain. The trip will do you good. You keep too close anyway," the good woman replied.

She walked several blocks before deciding to board a street car. She had often read in books of that sudden change in the aspect of the outer world which disappointment brings, but she never had quite believed it before. She realized it now. There was no light in anything. The faces of the people who passed her looked dead and uninteresting. Every house looked as though a funeral procession might at any moment file out of its doors. The very pavement, drying in the patches of sunshine, felt cold and unsympathetic under her feet.

At Five-Points, the most dangerous and congested crossing in all Atlanta, she boarded a street car and went several miles out to South Atlanta. There she roamed around until mid-afternoon. What occurred the night before had made a wreck of her. She never wanted to see Eugene again. She was afraid of him, and to

think he had accused her of tempting him. It was false, although she had done wrong in consenting to his visits. She was ashamed and humiliated. What should she do? Where could she go? She dared not tell Gerald, and she had no excuse for leaving Mrs. Jermain. Was ever a woman in such a dilemma? Undoubtedly Eugene was crazy. If he had only spoken one word or intimated that he was sorry, she could have forgiven him. That he had not done; but, far worse, he had commanded and abused her. This she could not understand. Her brain was benumbed. She could not think.

She boarded the car for the return journey. After a few stops, Eugene ascended the steps. She came very near fainting and could hardly suppress a scream. He was pale and haggard and looked exhausted. When he saw her he quickly came and sat down by her. She averted her face, and looked out the window.

"My car broke down a few blocks back there," he explained. "I have a very ill patient, a Mrs. Lee, living several miles from here, and I was just returning from her home."

Doris maintained a perfect silence.

"Please forgive me for last night. I—can't talk—about it—it hurts—me so. Let me—suffer for my cowardly conduct, and then—I—O, you don't know how sorry I am and was, even while I was ordering you around. I haven't slept, and

"I can't sleep, until you say you will forgive me," he pleaded.

She saw he was deeply moved, and she now understood that he too had suffered.

"You are forgiven. Let's don't talk about it," she said just above a whisper.

"You shall never regret it," he replied.

They were silent for several minutes.

"When I get to the office I am going to send you some medicine, which I want you to take and go straight to bed when you get to the house. You have undergone a great strain." He hushed as if thinking. "I will have to return to see Mrs. Lee tonight, therefore I will hardly be home before morning. Now, go to bed and rest. Poor, little girl," he murmured as he patted her hand.

"Feeling better tonight, aren't you?" Eugene questioned as he entered Doris' presence the next night.

"Yes, thank you," she replied evasively, then asked: "How is Mrs. Lee?"

"Better, and I want to tell you about that wonderful family."

The thoughts of the night before were uppermost in both their minds, yet they did not want to talk about it, and any new subject to talk about was eagerly welcomed. It would help to bridge over the chasm. The silence was embarrassing.

"Tell me about the Lees," Doris said.

"The mother is an invalid. You ought to meet her. She has one of the sweetest faces I have ever seen. After she had been made comfortable for the night, she told her husband that perhaps I would like to hear some music. Of course, I signified that it would please me, although I was prepared to be bored. You know I am very fond of music. I have forgotten whether I told you or not; but I have studied music a great deal, and, while I cannot sing, I can play fairly well.

"The old man called his boys together and, to use his own words, said: 'They would give me a little music.' Imagine my surprise on entering the parlor to see each boy—there were six of them, and five of them played—so quietly did they open all sorts of instrument cases, each drawing out a different instrument. One boy seated himself at a fine Mathushek piano. By then little queer feelings were traveling up and down my spine. 'One, two, three, ready!' the old man thundered. Such music as came from those little farm boys. Not a word. Not a mistake. It seemed too remarkable to be true. Tears came into my eyes. Such a feeling I never had before. They played difficult pieces, too. I remember one special one, 'Rain on the Roof.' I could have listened all night. To think what the world was losing by not hearing them!

"They would not play any more. I questioned Mr. Lee, and I begged him not keep those boys shut up out there, but take them out where the world could hear them. He smiled and told me how they had the most competent of instructors and how, when the sixth boy, who is a baby now, and by the way, his name is Hoke Smith, became able to handle an instrument, he would put them on the road. I learned that those five little steps of boys, each one to his daily task, would rise before daylight; one would milk the cows, two would get breakfast for their mother, while one sweeps the floors, and another makes the beds. All is done by sunrise and, in their overalls, they go to the field and plow or hoe cotton or corn until night draws near, when they again come in, milk the cows and get supper. The mother is sometimes strong enough to get the dinner. You may think I have exaggerated about this family, but it is all true. I have traveled a great deal, and heard some of the best music, but those boys with their music affected me more than any I have ever heard."

Here he ended and seemed lost in thought.

"I wish I could meet them and hear them play," Doris breathed.

"I must not keep you up late, for you are tired and I am all in tonight," Eugene said as he left the room.

CHAPTER VII.

Several nights later Eugene, very much excited, tired and worn, was talking to Doris. "I have something terrible to tell you, and I don't know how to begin."

"Tell it," she commanded. "Don't keep me in suspense."

"Gerald Chastain is the lowest, most depraved scoundrel that ever breathed," he began angrily.

"Now, before you make all those accusations, be kind enough to tell me what you have heard or seen," she said, haughtily. "Tonight, ever since you entered the room, your looks and words show that something terrible has happened. Be quick," she commanded, as he maintained silence.

He seemed not to hear her. His head was bowed in deep thought.

"It is awful, and you won't believe, yet—the physicians and nurses at the——hospital will verify my statement; besides, the woman left a dying statement which you can read, then you will know— O, yes, it will appear to you that I am saying this to influence you to leave Gerald," he said, as he saw the horror on Doris' face.

"What woman?" she questioned. So intense was her excitement that she unconsciously arose,

and was standing by his side, her fingers buried in his arm.

"Gerald's first wife, or—ouch!" he exclaimed, as Doris' hold of his arm became more intense. She smiled, released his arm and sat down, while he continued: "Rather, she should have been his wife. God! that man ought to be hung. To see that dying woman, neglected, starved, an out-cast, and that poor little mite of deformity, which came into the world and lived only a few minutes. Gerald Chastain should be strung up and shot," he raved, as he clenched his hands and rose from his chair. "He told you he had been married, divorced, and the woman was dead?" he questioned.

She nodded her head in the affirmative.

"Well, he did marry; but it was a mock marriage, performed by an impostor, hired by Gerald to do his dirty work. The divorce and death part came in when he met you, and, in his eyes, she was divorced and dead to him. He was afraid that some day you would hear something about it, and he made up that lie to shield himself; for he brought her here to Atlanta to live and he knew that many people knew, or thought, that she was his wife—"

"Eugene, please begin at the beginning and tell me all you know about this woman. I believe it will kill me. Tell me her name and all," she pleaded.

This morning, while driving through the poorest and dirtiest part of the city, I was accosted by a dirty old woman, who begged me to go into her house and see a very, very sick woman, who had come to her house last night and asked for shelter. The old woman quickly saw that Viola Sabiston was not able to be up, much less roaming the streets, therefore, she took her in and did the best she could for her last night.

“At a glance, I saw that she was suffering death and that something had to be done at once. I got her to the hospital. She remained unconscious throughout today, until nearly sundown, when her little baby was born. Then she rallied. Naturally, we wanted to know something about her. She requested that one of the nurses write her dying words, which was done. In the presence of several she told how, about four years ago, Gerald met her in a little country town in Kentucky. She was pretty, pure and sweet, and the belle of the village. Gerald fell in love with her and tried to persuade her to elope with him to this place. To that she would not consent. Then he proposed marriage, but telling her that for some reason it must be kept a secret for a certain length of time.

“Her parents distrusted him; but after his proposal of marriage she saw no reason why she could not come with him. She loved him and

trusted him; therefore, in the presence of two strange, hired witnesses, and by the impostor preacher, they were married. Unknown to her parents, and not daring to reveal her marriage, she left the town of her birth, her parents and all, and came away with him, leaving behind a stain on her name.

“They lived a very secluded life, and in a questionable, quiet place for nearly a year, or rather until he met you. Then, on some faint pretext, he took her back north and deserted her, leaving her almost penniless, telling her he was going to New York on business. Thus matters ran, until about fifteen months ago, when his old love or passion revived, and he wrote her to come to him here. She, believing she was his wife, was ready to forgive and return to him. I suppose that is where he has been on some of those long trips, and also suppose that is why he was so penurious and selfish with you.

“They lived fairly well until about four months ago, when he began to realize what her child’s coming would mean to him, and he wanted to be rid of her for always. He tried to get her to leave here. She became suspicious, and this enraged him. Finally, in a fit of anger, he told her of the mock marriage and all. It broke her heart. She realized what she was—no name for her unborn baby; then she wanted to die. He

left her without funds. She could not return home with that cloud hanging over her name.

"For the past four months she has walked the streets, begging for work, suffering insults and tortures of mind and body, part of the time nothing to eat and no place to sleep. She was pitiful in her starved, emaciated condition, and the effect it had on those physicians and nurses was heart-rending. That little life, so starved and so pitifully deformed, bore evidences of what she had endured. She forgave Gerald and went out with a blessing on her lips for him. She died just as the sun was going down," he murmured brokenly.

Doris sat in mute silence, too cruelly wounded to speak, while the tears coursed down her cheeks.

"Poor little woman," she murmured.

"Doris, come to me. Be my wife," Eugene pleaded as he knelt before her and tried to take her in his arms. "The law will give you a divorce. No stain will be left on your name. He will not dare fight the case now. Come, sweetheart. Oh, I want you. Let me make up to you what that man has made you suffer."

She gently pushed him from her. He rose and bowed his head on the mantel. Never again would he take advantage of her.

"Don't, Eugene, not now, anyway. Don't fail me now. Remember, I have trusted you." He

understood. "Give me time to think. What shall I do? Which way shall I turn? O, Father, help me now!" She seemed unconscious of his presence and was addressing an Invisible One.

Once more, he turned to her. "I'm ready, waiting," he pleaded.

"Yes, I know," she answered; "but I must have time to think. That woman?" she questioned. "She must not be buried by the city. No matter what the cost, her remains must be sent to her parents, and her name cleared of all stain. I haven't the money. Will you do that for me?" she pleaded, with tears in her eyes.

"That has all been attended to, and I also asked those present when she died to please keep silent, as it concerned a friend of mine. So do not worry, it will not get in the papers," he replied gently, as he tried to take her hand.

"Thank you; you are very kind. Please leave me now. I have borne all I can tonight."

"Sweetheart, I hate to leave you now, when it seems as if you need me more than ever. Won't you decide now? Make up your mind to leave that man. He is unworthy of the respect of the lowest of women. You do not love him, and I want you," he pleaded with open arms, love and sympathy shining in his eyes.

It was almost more than she could do to resist him. Never would she need him as she needed him now. But she shook her head.

“Give me until to-morrow night to decide. These nights have to end anyway. Now—go. Don’t beg—me—any more,” she exclaimed, as she wearily turned away from him.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Good night," he said tenderly, and was gone.

The next night Eugene, eager, expectant and confident that Gerald's infidelity would induce Doris to be his wife, could scarcely wait for the usual hour to enter her room. Four weeks of such nights, and this was to be the last. Only a little while longer to wait, and Doris would be his bride. Such dreams and wonderful plans as he had for their future!

Doris was pale and nervous, and dressed in the same simple blue evening dress that she had worn on previous evenings.

With an eager cry, and the lovelight shining in his eyes, Eugene, with open arms, advanced to her.

"I have come for my answer. It must be, it shall be, yes," he cried.

She gently pushed him from her. "It is no," she said, as she bowed her head.

Dumb with amazement, he watched her for a second. "No," he echoed, as all the joy, gladness, and light faded from his face, and he sank into a chair. "Surely you cannot mean what you say, knowing the truth about Gerald. Perhaps," he questioned eagerly, "you do not believe what I told you last night!"

"Yes, I do," she quickly interrupted. "I went to the hospital this morning and found it to be even worse than what you said. I did not let any one know who I was, only telling them I was a friend to the dead woman. I know you, and perhaps the majority of the world, will think I am insane to live with Gerald now; but I have studied long and earnestly over this subject, and prayed and prayed to God to lead me right; and now, no matter what others say, I know that I am doing my duty by living with him. It seems as if he is lost—lost—but maybe I can save him, and, if I can, it will be worth the price I have to pay." She ceased speaking. They were both lost in deep thought for several minutes. He broke the silence.

"Then you are going to tell him what you have learned? You will have to, now," he said quietly.

"No, I shall not tell him. I want to see if he will confess. 'All things come to those who wait.' I will try to have patience." She paused; then the pent up emotions of the past twenty-four hours broke loose. Her conscience, remorse, and Gerald's infidelity were too much for her frail body.

"Mercy! This is worse than a living hell," she cried, as she paced back and forth across the room. "What right have I to condemn Gerald? Look what I have done! You told me I could trust you. I could not. You—"

"Yes, and I meant it," he interrupted, passionately and with anger. "I never intended to take advantage of you as I did on that fatal night two weeks ago. I love you so much that I could not control myself, and it did seem that you were so calm and secure of yourself that it tempted me to madness. My conscience has punished me for it. You know I am sorry, so why speak of it?" he asked, as he rose from his chair and went to her with open arms.

"Don't touch me!" she exclaimed. "You say I tempted you. God knows I feel as if I cannot bear it. What am I? What have I done? Have I any right to condemn Gerald? The world makes excuses for a man. Am I not on the same downward path?"

"Don't, little woman," he sobbed, as he clasped his hands to his ears to shut out her accusing words.

"You know, I know, and God knows what you haven't done," he assured her truthfully. "I know I was a beast, a brute; no name is too vile to apply to me for my conduct on that night; but—"

"God, what if I had lost control of myself? I would have been shut out of Heaven and gone in a suicide's grave," she interrupted, sadly.

He continued: "You know that before then, and since that night, I have fought a terrible battle in trying to do the right thing by you.

Sometimes it was almost more than I could do, knowing that you loved me. Four weeks ago, when I made you those promises, I honestly meant to keep them. I thought I was master of myself; but I did not reckon with the love that was to engulf me. I love you, little woman, I love you so much that to lose you now will kill me."

He paused, waiting for her to say something. She was too overcome to speak, and he continued: "I know that I am dreadfully weak, and I presume that all men are. I made the mistake of stepping into this—thinking I could control my emotions; but, as you know, I could not. I am ashamed of myself but glad to say that you and only you held me back. I yet can't see how you did it. You—"

"Hush," she exclaimed. "Tonight I am going to tell you some things that I have endured during these four weeks." She now had full control of herself. "I now feel so secure in myself that I will dare to tell you what, I suppose, no other woman has ever dared to tell the man she loves. I am giving you up to-night—giving you up to return to the man whom I despise and who has dishonored me. This is the end, and, before you go, I want the memory of one woman that has been forsaken by her husband, been tempted, tried, and stood the test by the man she loves, to go with you through life. I would not be

brave enough to tell you these things if I thought you would dare again to take advantage of me. When you have heard all, I feel sure that then you will go and leave me to fight my battles alone." She spoke with head thrown back and chest thrust forward, while she made a brave attempt to conceal all emotion.

He waited in silence for her to continue.

"You say I have been calm and serene. Ah, little did you know the tumult that was raging in my breast. How little you knew, that on these many nights when I have sat just a few feet from you and listened to your pleadings, and saw the lovelight shining in your eyes, that I was longing to go to your arms and tell you to take me anywhere, any place—away from this." Here she paused for mastery over herself.

"If I had not loved you, it would not have been so hard; but I love you better than life itself. Look at me; look at yourself tonight. We have been fighting against the laws of nature. A little more, and we would both be in a madhouse." She paused again, as if lost in deep thought. "That night, when you held me in your arms and rained passionate kisses on my lips, it seemed as if I could not bear it. Then you led me to the precipice; O, so dangerously near, I don't see what kept me from going over, and I suppose that if I had known then about Gerald and Viola, I would have been lost. But it was God and

prayer that saved me; for if ever I prayed, I prayed on that night." She now spoke as one in a dream, hands clasped behind her, and eyes uplifted to the ceiling. "I've prayed every night throughout the last four weeks, and even sometimes through the day, to God to save me. He saved me, but at such a price that there isn't much consolation; not now, for the memory of that night is burned into my soul with a red-hot iron." Her voice was becoming weaker. She fought back the tears and continued:

"Not until I felt your kisses did I realize how much I had tempted you. I forgave you; for I understood that you were not responsible for yourself. When you were pouring out abuse on me, I pitied you and longed to throw myself into your arms and comfort you, but—I—knew—I dared—not," she ended, spasmodically.

He listened in perfect amazement at the words that rushed from her lips, while his eyes sought every expression on her face.

"That is not all," she continued. "On that night was born—" The words she would have uttered were left unsaid. Better for both, never to hear her say them.

"O, hush," he begged as he put his hands to his ears to shut out her words.

"Don't misunderstand me," she softly whispered. "The love I bear for you is not passion. It is grander, nobler than that. It is the highest,

purest love that any woman could bestow on the man she loves, and nothing could satisfy me but to be your wife in honor and glory, and with God's blessing resting on us. I do not want the stain and disgrace of divorce. Last night, when you told me about Gerald and you—"

"Do—," he pleaded, "my heart is bursting for love of you, and I can bear no more."

"Let me finish," she interrupted; "it will do me good. Last night, when you told me about Gerald, and you had left the room and I discovered that I had not committed myself, and knew it was not too late to turn back, I felt like a man must feel that has been tried and condemned to die. He stands on the gallows; the black cap is over his head; his feet and hands are tied; the last words have been said—only waiting for the end; all hope has fled; then—a reprieve comes. But a scar is left that nothing can efface," she ended in sobs that shook her whole body.

He dared not go to her. He dared not try to stem the tide. She waited once more to gain her composure.

"You men claim, in fact, you have often said, that because I held out against you I did not love you. God, what a mockery! I love you better than my life, and now, knowing that Gerald is unfaithful, it makes it all the harder for me. I had rather now be laid in my grave than know that I am giving you up to-night. It

is not man that I am afraid of, but God and Judgment Day. For the pleasures of a few minutes, a man or woman will send their souls to hell, and spend a lifetime in shame and degradation. Would that we could read the future! Would that we could live our lives anew! If I had yielded to you that night, or, if I was to get a divorce and go to you, how could I ever have expected to make anything of my children? Would they not inherit their mother's weakness?" she questioned, and he dared not answer.

"You must go. You must leave Atlanta, and that at once. Never again will I see you or write to you after you leave this room to-night. You—"

"My God!" he exclaimed, as he arose from his chair. "You are asking too much of me now. It is enough to ask me to leave this house, without asking me to leave the city. I cannot leave—I—I must see you once in a while. Don't take away every drop of hope," he pleaded. "I can get along fairly well throughout the days, but the—nights— Oh, how can I bear it? I loved you at the beginning, but now I love you ten thousand times more. I love you for your true womanhood. You have stood a test that only one woman in a million could pull through. My profession has taught me the frailties of men and women, and what you have borne has been

more than I or any other normal human being could do."

"I will go, but only let me see you once a month and I will try to be satisfied. Let me stay where I can watch over you. Gerald may desert you, kill you, or do something terrible when he learns of Viola's death. Please—don't send—me away," he cried as he once more held out his hands. "I will promise never to harm you again."

She moved away from him, shaking her head.

"You—must—go. I know you made your promises in good faith, but you are not strong enough to keep them; besides, if I was your wife you would not want me to divide my attention with another man, would you?" she questioned. He did not answer. "Well, it is either to go with you and be true to you, or to give you up entirely and be true to Gerald, and I feel that Gerald will need me when he learns of Viola's death. Conscience and remorse will then overpower him, and then will be the time for me to try to save him. You—must—go; if you don't, I will. It is hard, I know," she continued, pityingly, as he bowed his head on the table, and his body shook with sobs, "and it is awfully hard for me, but in years to come we will both be glad that we did this—the right thing."

"Don't send me away," came incoherently from his lips. "Come with me. We will go abroad, any place."

"No," mournfully and emphatically; "after the glamour, the passion, and the honeymoon was over this awful thing, divorce, would stare us in the face. We might continue to live together, but in our hearts that awful gulf would divide us."

He raised his head and looked at her. Never had she seemed more precious, purer, than at that moment.

"Well, I—will—go." He bowed his head in humble resignation. All hope had fled, and he knew that the end was close at hand, leaving her the victor. He was more pitiful in this resignation than anything else. It was too much for Doris. She stepped quickly to his side, gently pressing his head to her breast, and looking deeply into his eyes, trying to search his very soul.

"Don't, Eugene," she sobbed, "don't make it so hard for me. To-night is the hardest; to-morrow, daylight will be breaking. We will have one thing to console us—we have done nothing to bring shame on us. Trust in God. Pray, pray, pray, and pray for me, too, that I may be true to Gerald to the end. Oh, I want you to be a man, a man above other men; one that the world will be proud of; one whose name will be above

reproach. We have been so near the precipice. The time will come when we will be glad that we did not go over. Wherever you go, whatever you do, remember—that I'm—praying for you. Remember that I—love you," she sobbed as she pressed her lips to his over and over again. She kissed his eyes, his forehead, his hair, as she murmured: "God forgive me—for this."

With a cry, she turned, swayed and sank on her knees beside the bed, burying her head in her crossed arms.

"Oh—Father—help me," he cried, as he went out into the darkness reeling, groping, while every pulse in him hammered ironic salutation to the victor who had loved too well to win.

In his own room, palely luminous with the lustre of the night, listening ever now and anon at an electric car, an automobile as it whizzed by in the night, and later as the distant sounds of thunder came closer, he stepped out on the verandah to glance up at the fast-gathering clouds, and far in the night the voice of the pattering rain shut out the vision of the yesterday's beautiful day, with its dreams, loves, hopes, and ambitions which made life worth living.

Then all around him through the silence of the night, and the deep monotone of the heavy falling rain, he heard the voice of yesterday closing out to him a world dead forever.

CHAPTER IX.

When morning came, Doris, afraid of herself and afraid of Eugene, decided on flight before seeing him again. A few days before Gerald had sent her \$15, saying he would not be home for another two weeks. She hastily packed a suit case, and, long before Eugene had wakened, was speeding more than a hundred miles northward to the little village of Colburn, where she would visit her girlhood friend, Mrs. John Durham, who had now been married about three years and was living on a farm in the mountains of north Georgia.

As the afternoon began to wane, Doris alighted from the train at her destination. She had not the slightest idea where to find Sarah Durham. To her inquiries of the agent, who had not been there but a short time, she received no satisfaction. By further questioning, she learned that the Durhams lived some ten miles further up the country, near the mountains. There was a telephone connecting the hotel to Durham's home. Sarah was delighted when she learned that Doris was to visit her. Doris would have to spend the night at the small hotel, as it was then too late for John to go after her. John would be over early in the morning and they would get out to the farm before dinner.

CHAPTER X.

Shortly after sunrise the next morning, John Durham, driving a beautiful, sleek, black horse, arrived at the hotel. He was pleased to meet Doris and glad that she was to visit them for the next few weeks. He glanced at the one suit case, and remarked:

"'Pears like you ain't going to stay with us long," relapsing into the slow mountain drawl.

Doris smiled.

"About two weeks is my limit."

"Sarah will shorely be disappointed," he continued; "she hoped you'd come to spend the summer," with the mountain hospitality.

"Git up thar, Dan, and show Miss Doris how you can travel." To Doris' dismay, Dan got up, as he sped over the rough mountain road at a pace far too rapid to please her. Conversation was impossible with the buggy swaying from side to side. Doris studied her companion. He was a tall man, of a spare and sinewy frame, a head of sandy hair, thick mustache, keen, piercing blue eyes, and tobacco-stained teeth, shoulders a little stooped; age about forty-five. He wore a clean pair of faded, washable, store-bought pants, a homemade blue chambray shirt, which was left open at the throat, and minus a

tie; heavy brogan shoes, and a wide-brimmed, cheap summer hat.

During their intervals of conversation Doris learned that he had been married twice. There were two children by his first wife; Agnes, a little freckled face girl of nine years; Ben, a tow-headed boy of fourteen years, and little Mary, his and Sarah's six-months'-old baby girl. He loved his wife and children, and they were happy.

The day was soft and sunshiny, apt to be broken by a hurry of clouds and silver rain. When the sun came out again it painted a great bow in the heavens. Beneath that bright token bloomed the orchards, and the young corn waved in the wet breeze. The land was rolling and red in color, with beautiful trees and a narrow river. Eastward it descended to misty valleys; westward the mountain rose, bounding a noble landscape of field and forest. In the all-surrounding green, they passed many farms dotted here and there.

Doris felt that this was life; this was living.

"We ain't got much of a house to live in," he apologized, "but thar's plenty of room; it's clean, and we ain't got no bed-bugs," he continued. "When I get more able I'm going to build a nice home for Sarah and the children. Sometimes I tell Sarah, since Agnes and Ben are getting so big, I 'spect we had better move to town; but

Sarah, she won't hear to it. She says she lived in two rooms in Atlanta all her life; and now, no more cities for her."

"No, don't move to town and be cooped up in two or three tiny rooms without breathing space where, when a visitor comes, if you're real poor, you almost count the slices of bacon they eat, and dare not give them more than one egg; you want company, but you dare not have it, for you know it will run the grocery bill up several dollars; and dollars, to a poor man, counts in a city," Doris cried, as she stretched forth her arms yearningly.

This reply pleased him.

"If that is why you're going to cut your visit short with us, you needn't to. Your spending the whole summer with us won't run our grocery bill up. Our smoke-house is full of meat, more than we can use; the orchard is running over with apples, peaches and grapes; plenty of vegetables in the garden; and Sarah, she's just got the place running over with chickens. By gosh!" he exclaimed in dismay, "that reminds me I was to get some gravel for the little chicks. Gol' durn it! Sarah'll be mad. She's just taking off an incubator of 'bout three hundred chicks. Ever see an incubator?" he questioned.

"No, but I've read about them," Doris smiled.

"Well, Sarah's got one. One of them blame things makes you get up at night to see whether

the thermometer is running too high or too low; it matters not how sleepy you are, or how cold it is, when that thing's a-running you have to move. I declare, it just keeps me scared to death for fear it will set the house on fire. If you smell smoke at night, or, if somebody yells 'Fire! Fire!' you move, and that durn quick, for you'll know that incubator has hatched its last chick."

Here was a man interesting. She felt no offense at some of the rough words he used while talking. His wit was slow and entirely unassumed. She liked to hear him talk when he relapsed into the slow, mountain drawl. Incubators seemed to be on his brain. Doris deftly contrived to change the subject.

"Now, Sarah, she's different from Liza." Doris wondered who Liza was, but soon discovered that Liza was his first wife. "Liza, she was born and raised up here in the mountains, and never had seen a screened window or door, or a fine Jersey cow. Sarah, she's different," he repeated; "she had to have the house screened to keep out the flies, and these piney woods cows didn't suit her. She never let me rest 'til I got two fine Jersey cows. She had to have a sink put into the kitchen, and a big kitchen range." He shook his head, slowly. "Poor Liza, she cooked over the fire-place and was satisfied. Sarah, she wanted a windmill to put water in the house. I balked at that, but when I build the new house she shall

have all those things, 'cause Sarah, she's different." He smiled pleasantly at the thought. John loved Sarah. Doris felt that she had done a wise thing by leaving Atlanta. Up there she found welcome, peace and plenty. He turned his keen, blue eyes on her.

"You ain't got much color in your cheeks? Been sick, ain't you?" he questioned kindly.

"Yes," came faintly from her parted lips.

"Sarah'll soon git the roses back thar'. You're too young to look like that. Thar's a river down yonder where you can fish. Agnes and Ben will take you up on the mountains. This life, this pure air, will shorely work wonders."

There was a long pause as they sped over the road.

"Ever ride a horse?" His eyes were again on her. She shook her head. He laughed.

"Sarah, she used to ride heaps. You'll soon learn." He laughed again at the thought.

The way now lay down a steep hillside, and along the river bank, under a drift of colored leaves, and by the sound of falling water. In the distance it looked as if the house was at the foot of the mountains; yet, it was several miles from them. As they drew nearer, an old-fashioned, big, low-framed house came to view. On either side rose a great earthen chimney. An immense open hall ran the whole distance of the house. A wide low-framed porch ran the

entire length of the front. House, outbuildings and fencing had all been freshly whitewashed; over the porch flourished morning-glory and madeira vines; a red creeper mantled the back porch; the yard was bright with larkspurs, hollyhocks and lilac bushes. As Doris and John approached, a little girl, brown and freckled, barefoot and dressed in calico, sprang up from before the gate and began to run towards the house. Her foot caught in a trailing vine and down she fell. Doris was out of the buggy and beside her in a second. "Why, little girlie," she exclaimed, and lifted her to her feet.

"It's Agnes," said John; "where is your mother?"

"In the house, sir," answered the child. She slipped from Doris' arms and sped to find her mother.

At the sound of voices Sarah appeared in a big, checked gingham apron that almost completely covered her neat calico house dress. The tears of joy that were in her eyes as she kissed Doris later turned to tears of sadness as she took in the pale face, sunken eyes and wasted frame of Doris.

Agnes disappeared around the house for a few seconds. On her return she carried an earthenware pitcher and a gourd. "It's just from the well," she said, "fresh and cool. Won't you have some?"

“Why, bless your little heart,” Doris cried. She dropped her hat and took the extended gourd full of the icy cold water. “And this is a gourd?” she questioned, partly to herself. She drank the last drop. “I never want to drink from anything else.”

CHAPTER XI.

The conversation became general, fitfully interrupted with dozens of questions. Sarah had the dinner to superintend. An old black mammy was in the kitchen. She did the heavy work, but Sarah always superintended every detail. Left alone, Doris bathed, changed her clothing and rested until Agnes came to announce dinner. Doris was led down a big, wide, open hall and out onto a long, narrow boardwalk that connected the big house with dining room and kitchen. On both sides of the walk was a hand rail covered with morning-glory vines, and overhead a roof of shingles. In the kitchen was a great earthen fireplace, five or six feet wide and almost tall enough for a grown person to stand up in; here, suspended from long hooks, hung an immense iron pot, several smaller pots and two or three griddles, each standing on three legs. Such was the way our forefathers' meals were cooked. In a corner stood the big range that John had spoken of; nearby was the sink attached to a force pump, a safe, a long table, two spindle-legged chairs and an old rocker was the furniture over the dazzling white floor. On the wall, suspended from a hook, hung an old-fashioned bread tray; a flight of steep, perilous-looking steps led up to the attic. Adjoining the kitchen

was the dining room; a long, low-ceiled room, with a flooring of wide planks, scrubbed spotlessly white, and worn with the tread of many feet. In the center of the room reposed a narrow, long, home-made table. On this was spread a white oilcloth cover. On both sides of the table a narrow bench that extended the whole length of the table took the place of chairs. Another new one on Doris. A few cheap pictures adorned the walls. Here the hired men and the family sat down to dinner. Such a dinner! Fried chicken, chicken pie, string beans, stewed corn, half a boiled ham, cornbread cooked over the griddle in the big fireplace; collards cooked with plenty of ham bone and pickled pork in that big iron swinging pot in the fireplace; buttermilk biscuits done to a golden brown; apple dump-lings with Jersey cream; hard, golden butter; home-made jellies, pickles and preserves. It was the biggest feast Doris had ever sat down to. It seemed to her that there was enough on that table to have lasted her a year. John said a simple blessing, then excused himself by saying that time was pressing, they must hurry back to the field, and to "fall to," which meant "go to eating." They did.

Dinner was over when Ben arrived. He had been fishing. Over his shoulders was slung a string of perch; at his heels trotted a black and white spotted dog. Ben was fourteen, and old

for his years. Sunburned, freckled face, tow-headed, long and lank. With the exception of his eyes, he bore a very strong resemblance to his father. His eyes were open, big and blue with a soft, sweet expression; he was barefooted and wore faded, patched overalls, faded gingham shirt and a wide sun hat. He was boyishly shy toward Doris. When he smiled he showed a row of dazzling white teeth.

"Come, Ben, you must make friends with me," Doris said as she took his limp hand; "they say you're to learn me how to ride a horse; I'm to help you drive the cows home in the evening; I'm to go fishing with you, to the mountains and, in fact, to dog your footsteps for the next few weeks." Her smile was so winning that from then on Ben and Agnes were her faithful companions at all times.

The chickens had been fed and gone to roost; Doris went with Ben and Agnes down into the meadow to the hog pen to feed the hogs; she had watched Ben milk the cows, and, amidst the laughter and good-natured banter of the children, had even tried to milk a few drops from one of the Jersey cows. Supper over, the family gathered on the front porch for the evening chat, while Mammy Sal washed the supper dishes. Agnes had sat down on the steps and slipped her little sunburned hand into Doris', when she whispered:

"Can I sleep with you tonight?" Doris pressed the little hand. "Sure," she whispered back, "you can tonight and every night; you'll be company." Thus assured Agnes slipped off to bed. The men were too tired to sit long. In that house every one arose before the peep of day. Sarah, rocking baby Mary to sleep, sat long with Doris on the porch talking of the past and the hopes of the tomorrow.

The hour was late when Doris went to her small, quiet room; she sat long at the window; the moon shone brightly; the air was sweet and soft. In the distance a cow lowed, then all was still again. She rested her chin on her hand, and studied the highest stars. That day a milestone had been passed. She saw her road stretching far, far before her, and she saw certain fellow-travellers, but the companion whom her heart longed for she could not see. She undressed and quietly slipped into bed beside Agnes. She sighed and lay still, her eyes upon the roses Agnes had placed upon the table beside the bed. Blessed, thoughtful little child. The clock on the shelf ticked; the moonshine entered softly through the veil of poplar leaves; upon the bough that brushed the window a bird sang. She fell asleep.

CHAPTER XII.

Sarah insisted that Doris rest several days and learn to ride around the farm before attempting a trip to the mountains. She now had learned to ride well enough to go with Ben to drive the cows home every evening. The day came to go to the mountains; she could manage her horse and sit pretty well in the saddle. Sarah said they must start early. They must see the sun rise over the mountain. She had prepared a tempting lunch of chicken sandwiches, thin slices of boiled ham, deviled eggs, baked sweet potatoes, cheese straws, jelly rolls, pickles and soft ginger bread. This, neatly tied up in a shoe box, was strapped to the saddle. Ben, with Agnes, her hands tightly clasped around him, was perched upon the back of one horse; Doris, astride, wearing a big sun shade, rode the beautiful black horse. Five miles was as far up as the horses could go. They were now ascending the mountain, moving between great trees, fanned by a cooler wind than had blown in the valley. The road turned, showing them a bit of roadside grass and a glimpse of the sun. Ben and Agnes, with eyes unseeing the beauties around them, rode on ahead. Doris, drinking it all in to the brim, rode slowly, bringing up the rear. The road climbed on. Between the short-

leaved pine trees the little scrub oaks rose like a fountain. Everywhere was the sound of wind in the leaves. When the riders reached the crest of the little knoll, fashioned by the hand of God, the sun was high up in the clouds. Here they dismounted and tethered their horses to a tree. The little party, carrying the lunch box, headed by Ben, proceeded on foot. Up, up Doris went; her hands were scratched, a rent in her sleeve, her feet refusing to stay in the spot she wanted them to, until she became exhausted long before they reached the top. A bit of level spot was found. Here, high above the clouds and overlooking the valley, she stopped to rest.

"Children, I can't go any further—this time," she said. Ben and Agnes were disappointed.

"We want you to go to the top. Why, this ain't no mountain at all." He pointed to the east. "See that mountain over yonder?" Doris nodded. "Now, when you get up that mountain you've climbed some mountain." Doris laughingly protested and shook her head. "I'm afraid, Ben. My ankle turns, my feet slip, and I imagine at every step that I'll step on a snake. You see I'm not used to the mountains. Some other time I'll go, or try to go, to the top." Ben turned away in disgust. His home was there in the mountains; he knew every footpath, every road, and it was strange to him why any one couldn't climb as well as he could.

Doris sat down upon a rock, took her round chin into her hands, and studied the tracings she was making in the ground, while her companions, not without detriment to their bare legs, scrambled up, up the steep side of the mountain.

The wind blew; the trees whispered; far below her, in the valley here and there, she could distinguish the houses and small farms; they looked in the distance as but dots upon a desert. She tried to read a book she had brought with her, but it did not hold her attention; the book was a dull one, or it seemed so, as the best books are when the mind is drawn and stretched in one direction. Her thoughts, her heart was in the South. Was he there? Was he ill? Was he suffering? Did he miss her?

CHAPTER XIII.

The two weeks past, and lengthening into the third, Doris must turn south to Atlanta. A letter from Gerald, forwarded from Atlanta, stated he would be home Saturday. Tomorrow was Friday and she must leave before daylight in the morning to catch the train. Some few days before Mrs. Jermain had written:

"Dr. Stratham took a sudden notion to leave us. He left last week for Nashville. He left me his address—817 South B— street, A— Building. He wasn't looking well. I was sorry to lose him. I miss you. When are you coming home?"

Doris kept this letter for future reference.

The mountains, the pure water, fresh air, excellent cooking, daily horseback rides had had their effect on Doris. The roses were returning to her cheeks; she was no longer listless and pre-occupied, and several pounds of flesh had been added.

Back to Atlanta; back to Gerald; how she hated it.

All had gone to bed; she was left alone on the porch; her face was fresh and rested. She leaned against the door, deciding whether to go to her room or out into the yard. With a movement natural to her she raised her graceful arms, folding her hands together behind her back, and,

leaning back against the woodwork, looking dreamily up at the sky as she did so. For several minutes she remained in this attitude, then decided she had best go to bed as she had to rise early in the morning. She went slowly to her room, a slender, girlish figure in white. Arrived in the room she found Agnes fast asleep, her yellow hair spread out upon the pillow, her night dress open at the throat. She stood for a minute beside the child, then bent and softly kissed her. "Poor little girlie, I'm going to miss you. Oh! if I only had a child—a baby—I'd have something to love—to live for; something then that would be an insurmountable barrier between Eugene and me, and draw Gerald and me nearer to each other," she murmured to herself. She moved over to the window and sat down before it, resting her arm upon the sill and her head bent upon her arm, looking far into the night, toward the South—Atlanta—and all it once held dear to her. The sky looked cold and cloudy as though it might rain. Doris, sitting idle, felt her eyes fill with tears. They did not fall. She was fast regaining self-control. The moments passed, bearing with them pictures seen through unshed tears. She was living over again those four weeks spent with Eugene.

CHAPTER XIV.

Sixteen months had passed since Eugene had left Atlanta and located in Nashville. It was an afternoon late in October and the atmosphere was damp and chilly. He sat in his office in one of the city's most prominent buildings. Several unopened letters lay upon his desk. His negro man servant, John, had gone to get Eugene's automobile for the latter to ride out into the country. While waiting for the car he let his mind review the past, with its pleasures and its pain. For the past few months his had been a busy life; already some of his writings had been accepted by the medical periodicals; slowly, but surely, he was climbing the ladder of fame. He thought of that morning in Atlanta when Mrs. Jermain had told him that Doris had fled, and how unhappy he had been. The same old longings, desires were eating his life away. Not a line, not a word had he heard from or of Doris since that fateful night. She had spoken the truth when she said it was the end.

Honk! Honk! The car was at the curb. As he passed out the door he picked up a light overcoat and threw it across his arms, for the late afternoons of October in Nashville are cool, and went down the steps to the waiting John and the car.

"Drive, John; drive like the devil," was his command as he sank into the back seat. "I want to get out into the country."

The hour was between three and four in the afternoon and Nashville was crowded, as it generally is at that time in the afternoon. John was driving at a rapid pace, too rapid for him in that congested district. He expected to be pulled by a cop at every minute. The point at which Eugene was now rapidly approaching is an extremely busy one. There are numbers of big hotels in the neighborhood; it is near many of the principal theatres; there are many fashionable shops; it is only a short distance to the station, and there the usual carts, vans, carriages, automobiles, chasing each other up and down the streets and not leaving room enough even for two carriages to pass each other on either side of the tracks. The streams of traffic meet noisily and thump and bump and jostle through with difficulty. A man standing there may watch the expression change in all faces as they approach that point. It is an odd sight, though one which few people see, everyone being concerned for his own safety and oblivious to his neighbor's dangers, and yet in every large city there is one of these crowded streets.

A certain man, one whom in the years to come proved to be Eugene's best friend, stood at the corner waiting for an opportunity to pass. There

was a momentary interruption of the line of vehicles on the uptown side, which was nearest him. He stepped forward first toward the track. Too late. He saw the big automobile belonging to Eugene coming up, on the other track, at a high rate of speed as though the driver had lost control of the car and from his side came another car. For a second he lost his head. Eugene's car hit him, brushing him aside and knocking him to the street. Both cars stopped. In an instant Eugene was out of the car and by the side of the man, who instantly had regained his footing. In less than a minute Eugene had the man in his car, driving with him to his office. The accident had sobered Eugene. His companion was not injured, save for the shock and minor bruises. Upon questioning, he learned that his companion was Leslie Smith, the celebrated mining engineer, who had just lately returned from the West. Eugene was deeply sorry for the accident and said so. Arrived at his office, Eugene carefully brushed Smith's clothes, ministered to his relief, and asked him to stop and talk with him a while. This Smith did. He asked:

"What in the devil were you driving like a mad man for, especially in that crowded street?"

"All the reparation I can make is due you, for I might have killed you. I've been longing for someone to talk to, so I'll tell you. For months

I've been a miserable man. I've made a success in my profession. My word is accepted as an authority, yet that doesn't give me happiness. When I left my office this afternoon I was nearly crazy——"

"What's the trouble? A woman?" Leslie interrupted.

"Yes," he answered slowly, "a woman. But I can't tell you. I've about reached the stage where I can't stay here any longer. Nothing satisfies me. I believe I'll go West; lose myself in the vast regions of the unknown—anything—to rid myself of the longings that are crushing out my life." He was sitting at his desk, one elbow on same, his head bent over on his hands.

"Come, old man, brace up. As you say, you might have killed me, so, now, you are in my debt. Come go back with me to the West. I'll leave inside a month for the mountains of Colorado, where I have some work to do, and then I'll go on to other places—South America—any place my company sends me." He paused as if musing. "I, too, have suffered. That's what sent me West. With me my case is hopeless, for my sweetheart died a few days before our wedding day."

There was a long interval of silence.

Leslie Smith spoke.

"I've heard of you and the work you have done. You know of me and my work. We are

not rascals, thieves, murderers or cut-throats. We've had a bad beginning, but we will make a good ending. Think over my proposition and join me in my journey to the West. I promise that you will have all the solitude, isolation and uncomfords you will wish to meet in life. Sometimes I never hear from the outside world in months. A few months, or years, with me in the open will make a new man of you."

With the parting injunction, "I'll see you again," he was gone.

CHAPTER XV.

Left alone, Eugene listlessly picked up the letters lying unopened upon his desk, and this is what he read:

“October, 19—.

“Dear One:

“It has been sixteen months since you went away. I stifled the impulse to write to you until last night; but if I had sent you the letter I wrote then it would have made your heart ache; that is why I destroyed it and am writing now in the daytime. Do you know the time to write to the ones you love is at night, when you’re alone, undressed, ready for bed, when all is hushed and still, and your thoughts are in communion with God? Such letters, though, are better not posted.

“My health is so wretched it seems as if I can hardly live from one day to another. I think I could have gone till eternity, as we agreed to do, had not this—the one big thing—come into my life; something that I know will hurt you, yet, when you’ve conquered yourself, will make you glad; for you know it will bring gladness into my life and bind Gerald and me nearer to each other.

“I expect to become a mother on or about January 19. Now, you will know what these few words mean. I live in hopes when the baby

comes Gerald will be a new man and my life will be happier. I am sure if I didn't think so I could not live through this.

"I look back over those four weeks spent with you and it seems I cannot bear it. At times shame and humiliation cover me, yet one thought helps me—I know you loved me. Then, when I think how near I was to the precipice, and only a hair's breath saved me, I fall on my knees and thank God for such an escape.

"If the world knew, it would condemn us—such is circumstantial evidence; but you know and I know that we are both innocent.

"The Bible says: 'Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder.' But God does not have anything to do with lots of marriages. I know he was not in mine. In the sight of God I am your wife, but in the sight of man, I can never be now. I feel that we will never meet again. It is better for us not to. I think so often of that night and its temptations, that sometimes I fear I shall go mad.

"I am weak, but if I had been weak enough to have fallen, how could I ever have expected to make a noble man or woman of my baby? I've suffered, you have suffered, too; men's natures are not so strong as a woman's. My suffering has purified me. I feel I shall be more capable of rearing my baby by knowing the temptations, pitfalls of life, thereby enabling me

to guide them over such temptations. Another thing I shall never do is to set myself up as a criterion for my children. This mistake I think many mothers make. On the contrary, I shall, when the proper time comes, tell them of all the mistakes of my life, and it cannot help making such an impression on them that they will never do what I have done.

"I shall never see fallen women, never hear others condemning them, but what I shall be merciful and charitable toward them, for we know not the circumstances or how they were tempted. If some good woman would always lend a helping hand to a girl in her first mistake, there would be fewer broken homes and fallen women.

"I close with a prayer on my lips for God to take care of you; make you an honorable man that the world will be proud of; to bless my home, my unborn baby, and keep me true to the end. As God has taken care of me in the past, I am not afraid—He will take care of me to the end.

As ever,

DORIS."

Alone in his office, at the close of the day, when Eugene read this letter he exclaimed: "O Father, such an end!" Then, burying his face in his arms, he sat in silence until long after night had fallen when he was aroused by

his faithful colored man, John King, who had been with him ever since he left Atlanta. The expression on the poor negro's face was pitiful as he beheld the white, haggard face and blood-shot eyes of Eugene. John saw the open letter, in a lady's delicate handwriting, lying on the table, and he said to himself: "A woman's at the bottom of this." However, being careful not to mention his thoughts to Eugene, he managed to get him to his room, undressed and to bed. John was so afraid Eugene would do something desperate that he begged to be allowed to sleep on the rug by the fire that night. This request Eugene granted. Throughout the night he kept John awake by his moanings and mutterings.

When morning came Eugene felt better. While dressing to go to his office he asked: "John, did I talk in my sleep last night?"

"No, sir, boss, but yo' sho' kept me kinder scar't. Yo' feels bettah dis mawnin'?" he questioned, anxiously.

The worst was over now for Eugene, yet all through the day he kept thinking he could not give up Doris without once more seeing her—only once more—just to see her face and hear her speak for a few minutes. Then he could go far, far away and never see her again. Any two people, loving and trusting each other,

could never forget each other, no matter how they parted.

Knowing, in her frailness, how she had conquered the temptations and come out the victor, putting him utterly to shame for his weakness, made him love her all the more.

CHAPTER XVI.

Eugene had fully decided to leave the country to go with Leslie Smith to Colorado, South America, or any place where he could try to forget Doris. He would be a wanderer on the face of the earth. Perhaps that would give him peace, seeing new sights and faces. He fought with all his might the longings to see Doris once again before leaving. The tempter conquered. he wrote:

“Dear Little Woman:

“I will do as you did—write in the daytime—for, as you say, letters written at night are dangerous. Perhaps my letter will not be of much comfort. If so, I am sorry. I can never be hurt any more than what I have been since reading your letter. The worst is over now. I’ll try hard to regain my lost manhood and make of myself what you’d have me be.

“For your sake, I am glad you are to have a little one. I have often wondered, since I left you, would I ever have the pleasure of holding your baby—my baby—in my arms, but now I know it can never be.

“For your sake, I can also say that I am glad you did not get a divorce and come to me. Your soul is spotless, and God forbid that I should

have been the one to have put a blemish on it, although at times it nearly drives me mad when I think of what you are to another and can never be to me.

“You say that you think of those four weeks we spent together—so near and yet so far. God! How often have I thought of it. Often, in my dreams, you are by my side and I stretch out my hands for you and awake to find—nothing.

“You blame yourself; you call yourself weak. Little woman, did you know it is not the way we act in drawing-room, on the street or among a crowd that we should be judged? Public decency demands that we conduct ourselves properly in such places. Anyone can be a lady or gentleman there. The way to judge man or woman is, day or night, when two are alone, when all eyes, all ears, are far away. Then the man or woman that can resist temptation is the one who will have his name written in the Book of Life.

“I, too, often think of the poor little woman, or girl, without father, mother, brother or sister to guide and protect her, thrown at the mercy of the world. Perhaps she is tempted and falls.

“Then I see another picture. The rich, tenderly cared-for wife or sister, reared in the lap of luxury, with father, mother, brother or husband to protect her. She has never been thrown out on the world. She has never known temp-

tation. Of course, she does not fall. Place her in the same position as the poor sister and I think she could not stand the stress at all. Don't ever blame yourself again. I cannot conceive how you ever pulled through. It was against the laws of nature. I know it nearly made a wreck of your health and mine, too, but I am glad now that you were strong enough to resist me. I know I tempted you nearly to madness—for you loved me. I am filled with remorse, more than you will ever know. I was a coward, a cad; no name is too vile for me, but I was mad, and, oh, how I loved you and love you yet. I have never loved any woman but you, and, up until those fatal four weeks, I considered myself a gentleman. Since leaving there have tried so hard to redeem myself, and, with your help, your prayers, I hope some day to be what you want me to be. Such women as you would save any man.

“I know God is going to bless you, your home, and your baby—and that baby—such a baby. It will inherit its mother's virtue and become a man or woman that the world will be proud of.

“I am going to make one more request of you. I am going to leave here and go West. I haven't decided yet, but think I will roam the earth in search of peace. I can't get it here. Please grant this, my last and only wish. If you will, I promise faithfully that nothing shall happen to make you regret granting it.

"I am going to be in Atlanta two weeks from this afternoon, and I want you to meet me at Mrs. Jacob's, on X. Y. street, at four o'clock. She is a friend of mine. I once did her a service and she will ask no questions. You can come, heavily cloaked and veiled, and walk right into the parlor. I will make all arrangements, so you will not be embarrassed and I'll be waiting. Don't be afraid of me. I am not the coward I once was, and for God's sake don't refuse my plea. It is my last.

"May God bless and watch over the little woman I'll love until death.

"As ever,

"EUGENE."

CHAPTER XVII.

Two weeks later—a cold afternoon in November. A bright fire was burning in the fireplace in the tiny, cosy parlor of Mrs. Jacob's home. Two rockers were drawn close to the fireside. A small table stood in the center of the room and an upright piano was over in one corner. A few chairs and odd pieces were placed around the room and a few good pictures adorned the walls. Eugene, nervous, restless, white to the lips, paced back and across the room. Four o'clock—no Doris. Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed, and still no Doris. Not a message, not a line from her in reply to his letter. Perhaps she was ill, may be dying. The thought maddened him. On the piano lay several pieces of music. Perhaps if he played a selection it might help to soothe him and pass away the time. He seated himself at the piano and glanced through the music. He selected a well-known instrumental number. Part of it he knew by heart. With head thrown back, he softly and sweetly played "The Rosary." For a few minutes he was lost in the thoughts of the sweet, old music. He was calmed, soothed. The door was softly opened and closed. Doris, as she entered the hall, heard the well-known ballad and remembered that Eugene had told her that this was his

favorite selection; also, that he had studied music for several years. Although she had never heard him, she felt sure that he was a performer. That is why she entered the room quietly without knocking. Her entrance did not disturb him. She stood, hardly daring to breathe until he had completed the piece. Something told him she was near. He turned his head and looked to the door. With a crash the music stopped, and one glad cry, "O, my darling!" and, with open arms, he was at her side. She shrank back against the wall and murmured, "Don't."

His hands fell to his side.

"How long have you been here?" he questioned as she began to remove her veil, hat, furs and gloves.

"Only just a few seconds," she panted, for the thoughts of that piece, "The Rosary," and how sadly he was playing it, was ringing in her ears. That music was almost her undoing.

"I thought you were not coming," he murmured, as he stood facing her. She made no movement to remove her coat. The room was uncomfortably warm. She looked as if she were going to faint. He advanced again to take off her coat. She mistook his intention, and with a quick movement of her hands gently pushed him from her.

"Remember your promise," she panted. "You

must not even touch me. That is the only way to be safe," she continued sadly.

"I did not intend what you thought," he replied quickly, under a great strain, "not then, anyway. I only wanted to help you remove your coat; it is too warm in here. When you go out you will take cold."

For a few seconds he had forgotten why she did not want to remove her coat; now it came to him. He understood. She dropped her eyes and her body trembled. She did not murmur now as he, with trembling hands, unfastened the coat and she stood revealed to him—an expectant mother. The sight hurt him so deeply he could hardly repress the cry that came to his lips. One look told him what letters could never tell. He pressed his hands to his eyes to shut out her vision, and, groping as a blind man, staggered to one of the chairs by the fireside. For a time he sat thus, forgetting that she was still standing over near the door. Her voice brought him back to life as she almost whispered:

"Now, don't do like this," she pleaded. "You are weak and I am so much weaker than in the past. I have risked much by coming here today. I was not really able to stand the trip. If the man falls, the woman is to blame, so I see I must still be the stronger of the two, and—"

"O, God, I forgot everything when you entered the room except that I love you and want you more than ever," came slowly from his lips as he arose from the chair and came to her side.

"You must sit down," came from his lips as he gently led her to the other chair on the opposite side of the fireplace.

"Forgive me," he murmured, as she sank exhausted in the chair. "I will try to control myself."

He sat down in the other chair. For several minutes neither of them spoke. She, with head bowed on her hands, and he, with eyes trying to read the future in the fire. Both thought of the past, the baby, the next few months, the trip abroad, and of those four weeks together a year ago. He began by telling her of trivial incidents that had happened to him in the past year. He was going abroad. His practice was good; he had accumulated several thousand dollars. He never intended to come back.

She had regained her composure. Her plans were not much; all depended on the baby. No, she wasn't afraid to die. Yes, Gerald was very kind and thoughtful of her now; he did not take such long trips any more. Yes, he was glad, very glad about the baby. She felt sure her life would be much happier after the little one came. They had discussed every little incident of the past.

The hour was getting late; she must go. She arose to get her coat. He was too quick for her; They were so close to each other. She did not shrink from him, but she trembled violently as he, with trembling hands, tried to fasten the hook and eye at her throat. She looked into his eyes just for a second and there read his thoughts. It was so easy for him to take her in his arms, even though she resisted. It was the last time they would meet. No one to see or know what they were doing. Death might take her in a few short months. Surely, no one could blame them for this last parting kiss. Her eyes were lowered; a long-drawn sigh came from her lips, such as comes from exhaustion. She quickly raised her eyes to his. Faintly came the words, almost in a sob:

"Don't! Remember your promise. I never would have come if I had thought I would break down. If I yield now, my baby will yield some day—" She was trembling violently. His medical profession taught him she had borne all she could.

"You are right," he whispered, with head bowed low.

He got her hat, veil, gloves and furs, carefully helping her with them. They were both silent. She advanced toward the door. This action loosened his tongue. He threw back her veil, placed one hand under her chin, and raised her

eyes to his. They searched each other's souls.

"Little woman, I have suffered, but it has been worth it to know and have the love of such a woman as you. I see it is all for the best. 'God doeth all things well.' One word from you and I will cross the whole world. I really believe now that I shall become the man you would have me be. May God bless you."

He lowered her veil and opened the door. With head bent low, she passed out; while he covered his eyes with his hands to shut out her vision. Thus they parted, believing they would never see or hear from each other again.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Nearly four months later the baby arrived, and, although only about seven days old, she was receiving the admiration of the Jermain household; a tiny, sweet little girl whose name was to be Geraldine, after her father. Some two months before Gerald had engaged a competent, trustworthy colored woman, Janet Williams, who was destined to become a permanent fixture in the Chastain family.

Since the death of Viola Sabiston, some twenty months before, it appeared to Doris that Gerald was a changed man. It was presumed that, shortly after his arrival from that six weeks' trip on the road, he learned of Viola's death; anyway, a change for the better was quite noticeable in him. He never absented himself from the rooms unless on special business, and his trips were short and close together. He was moody, distraught and silent, yet withal kind and gentle with Doris. For several days before the baby came he knew he had refused several urgent calls to go downtown; and since the baby had come, he still persisted in refusing to go out in town. His continual presence and silence perplexed her, and, finally, when she began to notice his white, haggard face, it got on her nerves. She wondered if he had committed another cowardly act, but brushed aside this

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thought as unworthy. Had he not been a different man for months?

Doris, with little baby Geraldine sleeping by her side, had awakened from a restful sleep and saw Gerald, pale and haggard, but with love, devotion and sadness shining in his eyes, standing at the foot of her bed, apparently watching her.

"Gerald, what is troubling you? Why do you watch me? I wish you would tell me," she exclaimed petulantly.

"Nothing," angrily. "Oh, I wish I could tell you; but I cannot," he ended in a wail.

"Yes, you can," she gently said. "Haven't I the right to share your joys and sorrows? Tell me; perhaps I can help you," entreatingly.

"Yes, the joys, but not the sorrows and disgrace. Oh—I can't—tell—you," came from his lips.

She had an idea what was coming. Oh, if he would only confess and ask for her forgiveness; that, with the perfect, beautiful baby at her side, would fulfill her heart's desire.

"Come here, Gerald, and kneel down by my side." Her voice was sweet and gentle as the cooing of a dove. He knelt by her side, passing one arm across her body, while his head fell on her breast. She smoothed back the beautiful brown hair from his forehead and gently patted him on the back, as a mother would soothe her babe.

"Now, Gerald, tell me all," she whispered.

His body shook with sobs.

"Oh, I can't. It is too low, too wicked for your sweet, pure ears. Hell is too good for me. I must pay the penalty for my sins. I love you so much I cannot give you up, and to tell you means to lose you. If I could only know that you could love me, forgive me, when you know all that I have—"

"Calm yourself. I know all and have known since the day she died."

"You know about Viola Sabiston?" he questioned, as he raised his head and looked at her in astonishment.

"Yes, all," she whispered gently.

His head again fell on her breast, while he gave way to the pent-up emotions that had been smothering him for months.

"Thank God, I cannot believe it; and to think you have lived with me, borne our child, and all, when you knew what a creature I was. You won't leave me now?" he questioned. She shook her head, and he continued: "Ever since the night our baby came, and I saw how you suffered, even with the best of care and attention, I have thought of Viola, neglected, starved, an outcast, and the thoughts of how she must have suffered in body and mind to bring my little deformed baby into the world—oh, it seems I cannot bear it." Doris waited for him to gain control of himself.

"Some day I will tell you all. You, whose life has been blameless and above reproach, are too good for me, whom God cannot even forgive—"

"Don't ever say that again," she cut him short; "for my life has not been blameless or above reproach. I have done and said many things that I would give my life to undo. We know not what secrets lie buried in others' hearts."

His confidence and trust in her had cut her like a two-edged sword, and she was almost tempted to tell him all.

"Darling, your soul is too sweet and pure to have ever done any great wrong; so don't tell me that again. Oh, if God only would forgive me and you could forgive I would gladly spend the remainder of my life in atonement," he pleaded.

"I forgave you long ago. Let the past be buried. Repentance is a step toward forgiveness. You must pray, pray; God will forgive you. Let us pray together now," she said weakly. The strain was becoming too much for her.

"Anything you ask," he replied brokenly.

An hour later Gerald tip-toed into the room to take a peep at the mother and baby. Doris, with a smile on her face, and baby Geraldine were asleep. He gently tucked the covers in around Doris' shoulders, then bent and lightly touched his lips to her forehead.

CHAPTER XIX.

The next morning after the meeting with Doris at Mrs. Jacob's Eugene caught the first train for Nashville. He told John to refuse all patients or callers that day, that he was too ill to see anyone.

Late in the afternoon, after he had bathed, changed clothing and rested, he decided to hunt up Leslie Smith and tell him he had fully decided to go with him to the West. Just as he was ready to leave the room he got a glimpse of himself in the mirror of the dresser, standing over in one corner of the room. Of late he had steadfastly refused to even look into the mirror. Shocked, he turned around, went to the dresser and scrutinized his countenance closely to assure himself that he was not mistaken by the first glance. He was surprised at the change which had been slowly undergoing in his person. His color had gone, his eyes were sunken and dark circles surrounded them, deep lines were in his face, lines which at his age should never have been there.

He walked slowly down the street in the warm glow of the afternoon sun, scarcely heeding the passing crowd or the direction he took. On a corner he stopped to think. As usual, the streets were crowded. In the normal life of a city the

crowd comes and goes as regularly as the blood flows in the human body. From that dark, gray hour in the morning, when the first rumble of the cart is heard in the almost deserted streets, you may note the same ebb and flow of life's stream.

Eugene had called often on Leslie Smith of late. By force of habit, he found himself at Leslie's door, a quarter of an hour later. He paused, reflected a moment, then ascended the steps and rang the bell. Leslie, with a smile of welcome and extended hand, greeted him.

"I've come to tell you I'm ready to go with you; the sooner the better," Eugene said, as he sank into a chair.

"Good." Leslie replied, as he busied himself with some letters he was writing and cast sly glances at Eugene's pale, drawn face.

"Excuse me just a minute; I want to get these letters in the mail. There's a new magazine on the table; make yourself at home." He turned to his writing.

Eugene picked up the magazine, glanced over the pages, and let the magazine fall in his lap. He much preferred studying this new-found friend.

Leslie Smith was a strong, squarely-built and formerly blond man, or what is generally called the Saxon type. At first sight he inspired confidence, and his clear blue eyes were steady and

true. He had that faculty of looking almost superhumanly neat under all circumstances. It was easy to predict that he would become stout with the advancing years. He was already heavy, though not more than an inch taller than Eugene. But at first sight no one would have believed that he was eight years older than Eugene. He had seen and enjoyed much. His face bore traces of past pleasures and pain. It was a strong face, too, and not without signs of superior intelligence and resolution. The keen blue eyes had that trick of fixing themselves in conversation, which belongs to combative temperaments. At other times they were sad in expression, and often wore a weary look. His complexion might have been called almost weatherbeaten, for frequent exposure to the sun and weather had permanently changed its original coloring from fair to almost brown. Leslie had a very high standard of honor, too. Many men whom Eugene knew had that, yet since his blasted hopes and disappointments in Atlanta he seemed to have lost confidence in the universe, and now there were but very few men whom he felt that he could never suspect of some little meanness. That was another step down from the pedestal on which Eugene had once set up his ideal. One of the chief points about Leslie that appealed to Eugene was his breadth of view, or absence of narrowness. Eu-

gene vividly remembered an afternoon, several days before, when they were discussing love and religion, and Leslie had plainly stated that he never laughed at anyone's love or religion. Simple words that others would do well to heed.

An old book, by one of the old, well-known writers, lay face downward on the table. Eugene laid aside the magazine and began to glance through the book. He saw several paragraphs marked with a pencil. He read:

"He laughs at the idea of friendship who turns a little pale at the memory of love. At all events, most of us feel that friendship is an undeniable thing, and a little less certain, inasmuch as it is harder to exclude from it the element of personal interest and advantage. That fact is, that no person can possibly combine all the elements supposed to make up what everyone means by friendship. It would be far more reasonable to construct one friendship out of many persons, securing from each of them at least one of the qualities necessary. For instance, if a certain individual is extremely liberal and ready to lend all he has to a friend, does it follow that he possesses the tough, manly nature that will face public scorn rather than abandon that friend in his hour of need; or the discreet man, to whom it is safe to tell all one's secrets when they must be told at all, is he not, as a matter of course, the man most capable of giving the best advice?"

"Humph!" this was interesting, and right along the subject uppermost in Eugene's thoughts. He turned the pages and found other marked sentences:

"Some men, too, want encouragement; others want sympathy in their troubles, and will have it, even at the cost of common sense; and, then, others need, most of all, to be told the unpleasant truth about themselves in the most pleasant form practicable." Altogether, it seems probable that the ideal friend has a rough road to travel.

Eugene wondered whom Leslie had in view when he marked those truths, and he wondered if in the future whether he would approach as near that ideal as he imagined Leslie expected of him. If he had failed Doris, he would try to not fail Leslie.

Further on he again read:

"It is probably easier for a man to describe a man than a woman. The converse may possibly be true also. Men see men, on the whole, as they are, each man being to each other an assemblage of facts which can be catalogued and referred to. But most men receive from woman an indefinite and perhaps indefinable impression, besides, and sometimes altogether at variance with what is merely visible. It is very hard to convey any idea of that impression to a third person, even in the actual presence of the woman described; it

is harder still when the only means are the limited black and white of printed English."

How true, Eugene thought, were those lines. Evidently Leslie preferred deeper readings than the average person of today.

Becoming more deeply interested as Leslie was yet writing, he glanced hurriedly through the book for other markings. He found this:

"Between the two, between prettiness and beauty, there is a debatable country of brown-skinned, bright-eyed, swiftlike women of aquiline features, and sometimes of almost man-like energy, who succeed in the world, and are often worshipped for three things—their endurance, their smile and their voice. They are women who, by laying no claim to the immunities of womanhood, acquire a direct right to consideration for their own sakes. They also may often possess that mysterious gift known as charm, which is incomparably more valuable than all the classic beauty and perfection of coloring which nature can accumulate in an individual. Beauty fades; wit wears out; but charm is not evanescent."

Here Eugene closed the book. He caught Leslie's eye. Leslie spoke.

"I see you have been reading—"

Eugene cut him short.

"Yes. I've read those remarks on friendship and describing a woman. That author under-

stands human nature. I'd like to have an ideal friend," he mused sadly.

There was an interval of silence.

"Say," Eugene asked abruptly, "did you ever have an ideal friend?"

Leslie reflected.

"Yes, once, for a while. Our friendship lasted for several years, but now—I hate him," he replied, vindictively. He again paused as if thinking of the past.

Eugene's voice broke the silence.

"Tell me about it," he urged.

CHAPTER XX.

"I never have told you of my early days, the death of my father, the struggles, hardships and ambitions—they are painful to me, and especially the treachery of this one man, who shall be nameless. It's been years since I've spoken of him."

He settled back in his chair as if for a long story. The sunshine entering through the window threw a roseate glow across the room. Outside could be heard the far-off noise of the passing throng; inside all was quiet and still. Leslie continued:

"Years ago, when in my teens, I knew this young man. He was older than I and far more experienced in the ways of the world. He had traveled considerably—but there, now, I won't try to describe him. You remember those words you read about describing people?" Eugene nodded. Leslie continued: "Needless to say, we were inseparable for years. I went to him with all my troubles. I told him all my thoughts and ambitions. I laid bare to him the secrets of my heart. He was one who seemed to understand me." He paused, in deep study. "With all the treachery of the after years, I still have the memory of knowing that his advice to me was always for the best. He never led me astray,

and he stood ever ready to shield or protect me from all harm. I was poor then; it was a struggle to make ends meet. As the years passed we became separated, he going to another city, and in the meantime I was steadily succeeding with my work and had saved a few hundred dollars. Months flew by, I heard nothing from him. Then all of a sudden his letters came thick and fast. He was in trouble and wanted to borrow money of me. He first asked for only a small sum, gradually increasing the amount with each letter, until I had sent him \$90. I had the money to spare, and why should I refuse him? Was he not the dearest friend I had? Had he not always been honest and truthful with me, never stooping to deceit or lies? I had set him up on a pedestal; he was my god, my idol. What was mine was his. I'd have gone through the very gates of hell for him. As the amount began to grow, he offered to give me security, either a note or a handsome watch that his mother had given him. Like a fool, I refused. The very thought was repulsive to me. Months passed. My mother, who was getting old and feeble, took to her bed. Doctor bills came thick and fast, and owing to the care I had to give her I lost much time from my work. Gradually the little amount I had saved dwindled down until the last penny was gone. Mother grew worse. I became involved in debt, yet I would not write to my friend

for the money he owed me, thinking that perhaps he was in the same financial circumstances as myself. Then my creditors began to assail me. The doctor said mother must have more delicacies, more nourishing food. She never knew that I was heavily in debt. Finally I wrote to him, telling him my circumstances and asking him to send me a few dollars, even if he could not send all. I waited day after day, but no answer came. Mother died. I wrote again, still no answer. I had to seek a new position, creditors threatening me with all sorts of punishment. Everything went wrong. I think I must have written him several letters during the next year or two, all without avail. Once or twice he wrote me short letters without ever once referring to money. His ignoring that question gradually began to change my feelings towards him. Then I wrote two or three sharp, business-like letters, asking for my money. No answers came. You might think he had never received the letters, but I knew better, which I could prove to you if I had time to go into details. Another year had passed. The world began to smile on me and my debts were liquidated. I had occasion once to go to the city where he resided. My time was limited and I did not have the opportunity to hunt him up, but sent a message to him to call on me at my hotel. I felt confident that he would not come, but if he did he would have the money

with him to reimburse me. I had heard that he was climbing the ladder of fame and fortune was smiling on him. It was with some doubt that I waited for his message. He was coming and I was pleased. Now, surely he would explain his strange conduct and pay me. He came faultlessly dressed. We talked of the past, of the present and of the future. His hopes and aims were high and he seemed the same friend as of old. If he had explained to me I could have forgotten and forgiven him. I did not want to humiliate him by speaking of the loan, therefore steered clear of that subject, hoping at every minute he would broach the subject and turn over to me a roll of bills. We talked until the hour was late. Imagine my chagrin, disgust, anger and disappointment when he quietly and coolly bade me good night, without having spoken a word on the subject nearest my heart. I was very angry and hated him from that hour and have ever since. I was so distracted that sleep was impossible and I walked the streets all night trying to cool my fevered brain, and I'm afraid if I had met him I'd have killed him. From that night I was a changed man until I met my sweetheart—but that's another story. I loathed him, I despised him. There aren't enough words in the English language to express my contempt for him. I had lost confidence, and even if, in later years he had paid me and apologized on bended

knee, it would have been too late. Confidence once destroyed cannot be replaced. Several more months flew by, and in my increasing hatred I wrote him a terrible letter, one that will, I suppose, burn in his brain forever, and I hope it will. After receiving such a letter any man with a particle of self-respect would have, even though he did not have the money, bartered his very soul to have obtained it and paid me. Not so with him. He never replied. That's the end to the beginning of an ideal friendship. I don't need the money now. I would not sully my lips by asking him for it. I never wrote him again, and never will, even though I were starving, dying. If we ever meet it will be as strangers. That's been years ago. I do not know where he is. Perhaps he has climbed to the top of the ladder, but he won't stay there. He will fall, for his ladder is on a sand foundation and it will topple. I feel though that the time is coming when my face and the friendship he has betrayed will haunt him. 'What we sow we reap,' and some day—it may be in years to come—he will seek me and ask forgiveness, but it will be too late." He bowed his head on the desk for a few seconds and then continued: "No matter what our trials or misfortunes are, even if the whole world is against you, if there is just one friend, one friend who understands you and is willing to overlook your faults, and you believe in each

other, life is worth living—it's something to live for."

The room had become dark. He arose from his chair and switched on the lights.

"And you are ready to go with me?" Leslie questioned Eugene, as if doubting his word. Eugene nodded. "Have you thought of the long months of exile, loneliness, without papers and letters?" Leslie continued.

"You ought to know that is my reason for going," Eugene replied.

"Then let's get down to business. I have to leave here in a few days."

Leslie told Eugene he had better dispose of his car and leave John behind. They would go by rail to Denver, thence the remainder of the journey by private conveyance. Very little baggage, not more than could be hauled in one wagon and strapped to the saddles of their horses, could be carried.

CHAPTER XXI.

Finally they arrived at Denver. Here they spent several days in purchasing supplies, dogs, engaging a teamster and a guide. Perhaps they would be gone for several months, and far from civilization and communication with the outside world. This is what pleased Eugene. It would give him time to recuperate and regain a foothold in the world.

They left Denver late in the afternoon. They hoped to travel a few miles before camping for the night. The afternoon was cool when they, riding their horses, left Denver and took the road to the north. Then the night came on and the way grew steep, and the heavy shadows of the overhanging trees made yet more oppressive the breathless night. The stars could be seen through the branches, but from the ground to the leafy roof the fireflies sparkled restlessly.

Eugene thought, as he rode, of the present and the future. It was an old, unfamiliar road to him. For some time they climbed through the thick darkness, but at last came upon the higher levels and saw below them the wide and dark plain. He loved the night that hid his weary eyes and soul from the prying eyes of the world. In the east there was lightning. Here on the mountain-top the air blew, and a man was free from

the dust of the valley. He drew a long breath, checked his horse for a minute, and sitting there looked out over the vast expanse, then, with the others, dismounted, and here they camped for the night. A fire was soon made, over which a pot of coffee was soon boiling, this with bread and the tinned food they carried was for their supper. They were all very tired, and all but Eugene were soon fast asleep. He, not being used to the saddle, was too tired to sleep, and for a long time lay with eyes uplifted to the heavens, thinking of Doris.

CHAPTER XXII.

For several days they traveled thus. Now they were descending the mountains and going down into a valley. The sun set and the dusk of early fall wrapped the forest, the dusty road and the pines upon the horizon. As night came on they again camped. The heavens were high and cold, and the wind bore a mournful message from the north, but by the fire it was warm. The nearer leaves of the surrounding trees showed in strong relief nearest the fire, beyond all was darkness. The horses, fastened near the camp, could be heard breathing, and out of the darkness came that lonesome, indefinable purr of the forest at night.

Men and beasts slumbered through the night, waked at dawn and, breakfast eaten, again took the road to the north.

The day wore on, the land grew more level, and the pines more frequent. Eugene and Leslie had ridden a long time in silence.

"Leslie," Eugene questioned, "do you think that a woman is ever justified in leaving her husband, getting a divorce and marrying another?"

Leslie turned abruptly in the saddle, facing Eugene. For several moments he was silent. That was a hard question.

"No, I don't," he replied. "A woman may have a cause for leaving her husband, but not in divorce and marrying another; that's adultery. Doesn't the Bible say, 'Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder?'" Eugene nodded. The reply was disappointing. "But there," Leslie said, "haven't I told you that I ridicule no man's love or religion. I'm not capable of answering that question. It is too deep for me. I do believe, though, that no man has a right to judge another in such cases. We, ourselves, may think we are ever so strong and capable of resisting temptation, but we do not know what we would do until we have been tempted and tried."

"You think, then, that circumstances alter cases?"

"Yes, I do. There is something wrong, though, with a woman who, while the wife of one man, accepts attentions from another. A woman's weak, yet some men are weaker."

"I can't agree with you there," Eugene replied with passion. "Without knowing what she is doing she may innocently accept another's attentions and never discover her error until it's too late. Sometimes the man is to blame. How about the man that intentionally thrusts his attentions upon a married woman, winning her love in return?"

Eugene's face was white with suspense, and

his heart almost ceased to beat as he waited for the answer.

"Oh, he is a damned scoundrel. I would put a rope around his neck and swing him to a tree at any time."

Thus Eugene was convicted. He sighed. The answer was what he expected, yet it hurt him. He would not let the subject drop; he must hear the end.

"Of the two men, which would you prefer, the man just described or your \$90 friend?"

"If the man loved the woman and intended marrying her I'd just call him a weak fool and prefer him, but if he was only after satisfying his passion I'd choose my \$90 friend. I've never tried to bring dishonor on any man's home, and my sweetheart's life was as unblemished as a child's, therefore I'm in the dark on that subject. We loved each other very much, only God knows how much. When she died she left me a memory that will comfort and cherish me through life. Death is not the worst thing that comes to us in this life. I'd far rather know that she is dead and gone to that bright home above than to know that she was living and would deceive me as did my friend. Her memory is sweet; it comforts me through the long hours of the day and through the stillness of the night; his only leaves bitter regrets and pain. I shall never love another woman. She was my life, my world. I

hope to live so that I may join her in that other world. He lifted his eyes to the heavens above, and his eyes were full of unshed tears.

"Leslie, I hope I will never betray your friendship. I hope that I will ever hold sacred the confidence and trust you have placed in me. Some day I will tell you the story of my life."

They stopped their horses and clasped hands, sealing a compact lasting until eternity.

The remainder of the journey was continued almost in silence. At last, when the frogs were at vespers and the wind had died in the evening stillness and the last rays of the sun had stained the autumn foliage a deeper red, they came to their destination. Here they unloaded and set up the tent. Tomorrow they would fell trees and erect a rude log hut, for they were to spend many weeks at this spot. A narrow river was close by, in which plenty of mountain trout abounded.

CHAPTER XXIII.

When supper was over Eugene went down to the river and sat upon a moss-covered boulder that hung dangerously over the dark waters below. The evening wind was blowing, and the sycamore above him cast its leaves into the flood, which sucked them under or bore them with it on its way to the larger river. This was his theatre, with its carpet of brown leaves, its canopy of twinkling stars, the croaking frogs, the chirruping of the crickets, and the babbling voices of the river were his audience; he the main actor.

How easy, he thought, it would be to let go his hold on the rock and slip down into the water below ending it all. The thought vanished as quickly as it came; it was unworthy of him. He thought of Doris and the trick fate had played him. He was in the devil's possession. Out there, in the stillness of the night, where there were no prying eyes of the world to mock him, all the pent-up emotions of the month had full sway.

He knew he was not fulfilling Doris' wishes. He was not looking to a Higher Power, and ever since that fatal night he had even ceased to pray. Peace, peace, was what he desired. "Ask and it shall be given unto you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." But

he had not asked; his heart was hard and restless, and as he looked down into the dark waters below he thought of Longfellow's beautiful words:

"How often, O, how often,
I had wished that the ebbing tide
Would bear me away on its bosom
O'er the ocean wild and wide.
For my heart was hot and restless,
And my life was full of care,
And the burden laid upon me
Seemed greater than I could bear."

And this:

"And I think how many thousands
Of care-encumbered men,
Each bearing his burden of sorrow,
Have crossed the bridge since then."

The words soothed him, and with half-closed eyes he listened to the distant utterances of the night wind, with its mournful wail, as it bore its message from the north, and with it, after the day's hot communion with old wrongs, he felt a sudden peace. He was at the turn; the savage within him receding, and the man beckoning from afar.

It was more than he could bear. With his hands clasped before him and his eyes uplifted

to the starry skies he arose and fell on his knees, while it seemed that for a few seconds even the wind ceased its sighing; the frogs hushed their voices, the babbling waters stood still, and that for an instant a bright, dazzling light descended from the heavens above and shone o'er his head, as he cried out: "Oh, Father, help me. Make of me what she would have me be. Do with me as thou wilt."

"Eugene! Eugene!" Leslie Smith's voice called from the darkness.

With a face illumined with God's holy light Eugene arose. He had found peace.

"I'm coming." His voice echoed back through the shadows.

* * * * *

CHAPTER XXIV.

Twenty-seven months had passed since the afternoon when Doris had parted from Eugene at Mrs. Jacobs' home. Doris had regained her usual health, and, if anything, was more beautiful than ever. Motherhood, that beautiful, blessed gift bestowed on women by God, had ennobled and purified her. Her figure was fuller; her soft blue eyes shone as stars. Little Geraldine, now two years old, was a blessing to her. Her life was happy. She would go about her daily tasks laughing and singing, and often during the months Gerald would take them to the different places of amusement. Her love for Eugene was not one whit less, and the happiness came from resignation, knowing that she had done her duty and had redeemed Gerald, bringing him to God, and that she had won his love.

Was she jealous of Viola? No such thought had ever entered her head. She always thought of Viola with love and compassion. Gerald knew this, and it puzzled him. Truly, she was a wonderfully, pure, godly woman, and this kindness and sweetness of her disposition in her daily walks of life had its effect on Gerald. Since the day he had confessed to her and prayed to God for forgiveness he had been a different man.

Gradually he began to look on the higher things of life, became kinder and gentler as the days flew by, and ever took a delight in rocking Geraldine and crooning lullabies to her.

Often of late Doris had thought how good and merciful God had been to her when she opined that she could never be happy again. What had brought this miracle? Repentance and confession and a tiny little baby—tiny little toes, tiny little fingers to twine around her fingers; such a beautiful, sweet, brown-eyed baby as Geraldine.

Doris had reached the stage when if anything had happened to Gerald she felt that she could not have borne it. Anything that ill affected her baby's life she would give her life to overcome. Gerald's kindness and great love for her had won her love in return; not that she did not love Eugene, but Eugene was as one dead to her now, and "time heals all wounds." Therefore, if Eugene was to return to her and she had to choose again between the two, it would be an easy matter to turn away from Eugene to the arms of her husband.

Doris sat by the fire, on this winter morning, a piece of fancy work in her lap, little Geraldine on the floor with Janet, who was busy cutting paper dolls, anyone who had looked in on the scene would have pronounced it beautiful. The room denoted luxury, peace and com-

fort. A smile played around Doris' mouth as she calmly viewed Geraldine and Janet and thought of how kind Gerald had been to her the last summer, and how anxious he was to take them to the ocean; how he gave her plenty of money with which to purchase lovely wearing apparel for Geraldine and herself, and then of how they went to one of the famous resorts on the Atlantic Ocean and spent two months, and how she and Gerald would go walking on the beach, then would sit down and he would lie for hours with his head in her lap, while the waves rolled in at their feet, and how he would tell of his great love for her. How, at first, he always wanted to talk of Viola and the brutality of his treatment of her, and would question her as to whether she thought God had forgiven him.

To all these appeals she would soothe and console him with loving words, and never show him that the subject was a great hurt to her. He gradually grew tired of that subject and found contentment in watching the dancers, listening to the music that the band played, and being continually in Doris' presence. That was a happy summer to her, the happiest of her life. They had planned to return to the same resort this summer, and she was now in the midst of embroidering dainty little dresses for Geraldine, to be worn on the vacation. She saw such glorious visions for the future, too, that the darkness

of the coming years was a tangible horror now that they were fading away. The memory of a dream can be as vivid as the recollection of a reality.

Gerald had long since been promoted from the road to the office, and only on special occasions did he go out on the road now. He had gone out on a special call to a distant town the day before, but was to be home that afternoon. Gerald had confided to her a few days before that there was talk of his being taken into the business as one of the firm. They both longed for this. Truly, she had something to be happy over this morning.

There were sounds of hurrying feet, and a loud knock at the door, which was suddenly opened. Mrs. Jermain, pale as death, entered the room.

CHAPTER XXV.

"Mr. Chastain is dead!" burst from her lips.

Doris, overcome by the shock, heard no more. She had fainted.

"Oh, Lordy!" Mrs. Jermain cried, "I didn't mean to kill her."

The good old woman was so shocked when she received the message over the telephone that she did not stop to reason how best to break the news to Doris, and had blundered into the room and told Doris in the most cruel way. Mrs. Jermain cried for help. Several ladies, who had heard the news and had gathered downstairs, came running up and helped to get Doris in bed. A physician was sent for and pronounced Doris in a critical condition. The shock had affected her nerves and brain. Her condition became so alarming that she was at once moved to a private sanitarium, where she lay for three weeks between life and death. It was not until weeks later that they ventured to tell her how Gerald, accompanied by another gentleman, was returning to Atlanta and how he had lost control of his car, which turned over and buried him underneath, killing him instantly; and how the other gentleman had managed to get help, and how they were brought on into Atlanta; how Gerald's remains were placed with an undertaker, and of

the impressive funeral that his employees and fellow lodge brothers had given him.

Another three weeks, and Doris was allowed to return home. Such a home-coming. It seemed as if her heart was broken. It was only little Geraldine that made her want to live. Mrs. Jermain and the faithful Janet had faithfully cared for little Geraldine during Doris' illness. Several times Janet had been allowed to take Geraldine to the sanitarium to see her mother.

She dreaded to go back to Mrs. Jermain. There she had seen so much sorrow; yet Mrs. Jermain was so motherly to her. She had comfortable rooms and it was not an easy matter to get out and find the same comforts elsewhere. She had enjoyed much pleasure, too, at Mrs. Jermain's. She decided not to make any change for the present. After she became stronger and began to investigate Gerald's financial condition she found he had safely invested about \$25,000, all of which came to her and left her in such good circumstances that she, with careful management, would not have to worry. She could live on the interest of the amount left her.

What was to be done with Janet? Doris had mentioned the matter several times and Janet had set up such a howl that Doris finally decided to accept her as a member of the family, which she never regretted.

CHAPTER XXVI.

For fifteen months she lived a life of perfect seclusion. Her health was fairly good. Of late Janet and Mrs. Jermain had begged her to take Geraldine out to Grant's Park, to go for the baby's sake, if not for her own. She had finally listened to these pleadings and, with Janet, had taken Geraldine and spent several Sunday afternoons in the park.

One Sunday afternoon Doris and Janet had taken a light lunch with them and gone to the park to stay until after dark. The band played several selections and then began "The Rosary." This music brought back Eugene and the last time she had seen him. It recalled all the past. She could hardly repress a scream. Up to this time she had given very little thought to Eugene. Her life had been so taken up with Geraldine and the business of attending to her investments that she had only thought of him as a dream.

Her thoughts so unnerved her that she could not remain at the park. They left and returned to the city. Later in the evening, while Janet was busy clearing up the supper dishes, Doris paced back and forth across her room; then she would suddenly sit down for a moment, and then get up again. The music, the crowd that

afternoon, had saddened her; she was so restless. Why had Eugene never written? Surely, he knew that Gerald was dead. Where was he? Was he dead? Such thoughts were not to be borne. Another thought! I will write. Surely, it can do no harm. Just a few lines. But where to address the letter? Had he not said he was going abroad. She would address the letter to Nashville; it would be forwarded to him. With her to think was to act. She wrote:

“Dear Eugene:

“This letter may never reach you, for I know not where you are; nevertheless, I will address it to Nashville and trust to luck that it will be forwarded to you.

“Little Geraldine, Janet, my colored nurse, and I went to Grant’s Park this afternoon. The music, and especially the piece, ‘The Rosary,’ all reminded me so much of you.

“I don’t suppose you know that Gerald was killed in an automobile accident some fifteen months ago? I miss him so much. He became all that a woman could wish for—ever kind, generous and thoughtful of me after little Geraldine came. Although not a consistent church-goer, I believe he was a Christian.

“My baby, little Geraldine, is now past three years old. She has beautiful brown eyes and dark curly hair, and resembles her father very

much. She can walk long distances now, can talk, and is the pride and delight of my life. Life would not be worth living to me now if I were to lose her.

"Gerald left us in pretty good circumstances, yet I am seriously contemplating going back to work for the same firm that once employed me just as soon as Geraldine gets a little older. I feel I must work; that it will bring me contentment. Then another thought comes to me: I am tired of city life; I want to go to a small town or in the country, where I can have chickens, a cow, flowers, fruit and vegetables; a place where God dwells, and not in a city among shams and wickedness, and where you scarcely ever know your next-door neighbor. I think I want to go to Florida—south, where the oranges grow.

"I wonder where you are and what you are doing—out in some forsaken place in California, I suppose.

"I'd be glad if you would write, telling me all about yourself. I am at the same old place.

"Sincerely,
"DORIS."

CHAPTER XXVII.

Days slipped into weeks, weeks into months. Not a line or message from Eugene. Surely, he was dead. No, he was tired of her. Such is the fickleness of man. Perhaps he had married. Horrors! What if his wife received and read the letter. Oh, if she had not written! She became more reticent, more depressed. This grew to such an extent that she could not remain in Atlanta. She told Janet they would take a long pleasure trip to Florida about the latter part of February. If she liked, they would buy and build a pretty home there, then she could have the chickens, cows and things that she longed for. With such outdoor work to occupy her mind and time, life would be worth more to her. With these plans in view, she began getting ready for the trip. A plain, lovely, expensive dark blue tailored suit, with hat, shoes and gloves to match, was added to her simple wardrobe. A new trunk, Oxford bag and suit cases were purchased. Lovely white aprons and caps for Janet and dozens of beautiful little garments for Geraldine. All had been carefully packed away, not to be worn until their vacation began.

There was considerable doubt as to her returning to Atlanta, therefore all of her belong-

ings in the rooms had been packed in one of the trunks, to be stored by Mrs. Jermain; and, if she did not return, the trunk could be forwarded to her without trouble.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Three months had now passed since Doris had written to Eugene. Still no letter. She still counted the hours between the visits of the postman with the hope that next time a letter from Eugene would come.

The day before leaving had arrived. On the morrow night they were to bid farewell to the joys and sorrows of Atlanta. Doris and Geraldine were to spend the day in town with a friend.

The hour was 8:30 in the morning. The postman was coming. Surely, not a letter for her. She recognized the handwriting. Faintness stole over her. Her feet and hands grew cold. Sinking into a chair, she tore open the envelope and read:

“San Francisco.

“Dear little Woman:

“Holy Moses! as the little boy said, I’m so happy I’m ’bout to bust. Your letter just received. It followed me to Alaska, down to Mexico, and gracious knows how many other places and back to this place, where I received it on my arrival today.

“I haven’t time to write much, as I will leave here on tomorrow’s train for Atlanta. This letter should reach you about twenty-four hours before my arrival.

"No, I did not know Gerald was dead, and it is a good thing I didn't. I made it a point not to read any home papers and I have traveled into such wild, desolate places that no news of the world reached my ears. It certainly is a good thing you did not write to me before this, for nothing could have kept me from your side, and Madam Grundy would have had something to say. Now, be ready when I get there to go to the minister; and just make up your mind that if you won't go peaceably that you will go forcibly. I've done without you all these years and am not willing to wait another minute.

"Immediately after the ceremony we will leave for a long automobile trip to Florida. It will be grand motoring down there at this time of the year.

"Did I hear you say what is to be done with little Geraldine? Why, bless you sweetheart, we're going to take her and Janet right along with us, also my John, too. Think I'm going to have your eyes red from weeping about the baby? By rights she is mine anyway. So, now, have her and that Janet of yours (I don't know whether Janet is black or white) ready to go, too.

"If I don't stop I will never be ready to leave here on the next train. I will telephone you the morning I get into Atlanta. The train gets there

so late at night it would be impossible to see you before morning.

"I can hardly wait till the time comes when I shall have the right to hold you in my arms for ever and ever.

"Yours, with a million kisses,

"EUGENE."

CHAPTER XXIX.

With a face wreathed in smiles, Doris sprang out of her chair and began dancing around the room.

Janet, thoroughly frightened at seeing such capers, almost screamed: "Lawdy! Mis' Doris, what on earth am de matter? Has yo' gwine crazy?"

Doris never answered. She had picked up Geraldine and was swinging her around the room, violently hugging and kissing her. If her brain had not cooled it was probable that she would have had Janet dancing around the room in the next few minutes.

"Oh, Lordy, Mis' Doris, do tell me what am de matter wid yo'," pleaded Janet, with tears in her eyes.

Doris stopped a second.

"I am going to be married in the morning and we will all leave immediately in a car for Florida," rushed from Doris' lips.

"For Gawd's sake! Now I knows yo' sho' is crazy," slowly muttered Janet. Her eyes were as big as saucers and she backed up near the door, ready to run if Doris approached her.

"Whar's de man? I ain't nebber seed no man hanging 'round here. Am he one ob' dem paper men, de kind yo' gets thro' de mail by paying for

an' abtisement? I sho' tho't ye' had bedder sense den get one of dose kind of men," she questioned anxiously.

Doris, too happy in her own thoughts, hardly heard what Janet was saying. Eventually Janet's meaning dawned on her. Bursting into a low laugh, she said:

"No, Janet, he is not a paper man and I'm not crazy. He is Dr. Eugene Stratham, formerly of this place, this same house, whom I knew in years gone by. I believe it has been more than five years since he lived here. Since he left here he has been traveling over all the world and has just found out that I am a widow. You see, we have loved each other for years. I thought he was dead until this letter came. He will be here——"

"But, honey, yo' reckon he loves ye?" anxiously interrupted Janet. "What yo' gwine do wid me an' de baby? Yo' knows dose step-pas doan make bery good pappies, an' it would jes' natr'lly kill me to hab my baby——" Here she broke down and began crying. "Yo' knows baby an' me doan b'long in no honeymoon."

Doris tried to soothe her, but to no avail.

Janet continued: "I tho't we wuz gwine hab such fine time down in Florida, an' now all dem plans am dun' busted higher dan a kite." She was past reasoning with now.

"Now, look here, Janet, you stop that crying and listen to me. Let's get some sense into our heads. I told you once that you, the baby; John, who is Dr. Stratham's colored chauffeur; Dr. Stratham, and myself are all going together. Doctor says so in his letter. Do——"

"How come him no' 'bout me and de baby," interrogated Janet, suspiciously.

Doris smiled.

"Why, I wrote to him, of course," she replied.

"Umph! Umph!" she snorted, although she smiled. "So dat am why he is coming." She hushed crying and now became an interested listener and helper.

"Do you think I would go away even for ten days and leave my baby? Now, we have got to get busy. You take care of the baby and finish packing the things and I will get busy and telephone Mrs. Williams that as I am to be married in the morning, of course, I could not visit her today. I will go downtown and get two or three more gowns, blouses and other things that as a widow I could dispense with, but as a bride I will have to have."

"Yes, honey, doan stop wid two or three dresses, but get lots of dem purty things. I ain't nebber seed yo' hab all dem purty things like yo' ought to wear. Yo's got plenty ob money, so now, as yo' am gwine hab yo' husband, yo' jes' spen' some ob dat money. I jes' wish I could go

'long wid yo'; I'd see dat yo' got purty things." She was all smiles now. Anything that made Doris happy was sugar to her. Doris smiled as she thought of the things Janet would have wanted for her.

Doris, trying to get into a coat suit, with a mouthful of pins, managed to get in a word edgewise. Janet, happy in her excitement, was putting the face towel into the dishpan and doing other such silly stunts.

"He will be here tonight on the eleven o'clock train and be out here in the morning," with a kiss for Geraldine and these parting words to Janet, Doris flew on wings of love downtown.

Janet, too happy to stay in one place and keep the wonderful news to herself, grabbed Geraldine and flew downstairs to tell Mrs. Jermain and the others the wonderful news. Of course, Janet had to magnify it until, to hear her tell it, Doris was going to marry a prince.

Since the favored one was to be Dr. Stratham, Mrs. Jermain and all were more than pleased. He always had been a favorite with Mrs. Jermain. Doris, being her favorite too, it was natural that the whole house became excited, and such a cleaning and hurry and stir-up never had been in the house before.

The parlor was the place where Doris would receive him. It was rubbed, cleaned, polished and dusted until it shone.

Dr. Stratham and Doris would make a good match. Although Gerald ended by being a pretty decent man, yet, in Mrs. Jermain's estimation, he never could come up to Dr. Stratham.

CHAPTER XXX.

At last morning came to the excited occupants of the house. No one in the house now but Mrs. Jermain had ever seen him. All the boarders and roomers had passed out for others to come in. It was natural to suppose that they were all anxious to see Dr. Stratham. The majority of them were up at the peep of day.

The sun was rising.

Hush! what is that sound on the street? A newsboy is hollering: "Extra! Extra! All about the big wreck. Lots of lives lost!" Janet ran downstairs to the front door and got a paper. A terrible feeling came over her. What if Dr. Stratham is killed? She brushed aside the idea. There were plenty of trains to be wrecked without the one Dr. Stratham should have been on. She rushed upstairs to Doris, exclaiming:

"Hurry, honey, and read 'bout de wreck. Now, doan yo' get 'cited 'cause yo' man ain't in it," she soothingly said.

Doris, terribly unnerved, began to try to read: She was not interested in the wreck nor what caused it. What she hunted for was the list of the dead or injured. She found it. On down the names she glanced. Janet was watching her.

"O Father!" came the agonizing cry from her lips as she fell in a faint on the floor. Janet

didn't need to ask any questions. She knew from that cry that Dr. Stratham was dead. If he had been injured only, Doris would have held up bravely and rushed to find him. Thus reasoned Janet.

No time then for her to search the paper. Something must be done for Doris. With a scream Janet aroused the whole house, nearly all of whom came running to find out the trouble. They placed Doris in bed and began the fight for her life. Mrs. Jermain feared it would be the same for her as when Gerald died. It was now about seven o'clock. The marriage was to have taken place about eleven that morning. Such an ending. The house decorated for a wedding and ending in death.

One of the ladies grabbed the paper and rushed out of the room and read where the southbound passenger train the night before had been derailed, killing the engineer, fireman and several passengers. Among the list of the dead was the name of Dr. Eugene Stratham. The remains of the dead were to be brought to Atlanta that morning.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Doris soon revived. She did not weep nor mourn. Her grief was too deep for tears. The whole house was in tears for her. They had rather see her weep. She did not talk or ask any questions, but asked them to leave the room, saying that she had rather be left alone. After all had left but Janet, Doris asked her to help her dress, that she was going to search for his body. Janet pleaded with her not to go, but it was useless. She began to dress.

More hurrying footsteps. What worse could happen? This time Mrs. Jermain burst into the room. Her face was as white as a sheet, yet her eyes were beaming. Doris nearly collapsed again when she saw Mrs. Jermain. The old lady rushed to Doris' side and placed her arms around her neck.

"Lordy, honey, he ain't dead," she exclaimed amid her tears of joy.

That time Doris came near fainting again. "What do you mean? Tell me!" she screamed.

Then Mrs. Jermain told her how, just a few seconds before, she had got a telephone message from Eugene himself saying that he and John were in the wreck; how they had both escaped unhurt, and how he, not letting anyone know,

being so anxious to get on to Atlanta, had paid a big sum of money for a special automobile to get him into Atlanta by daylight, and how they had driven all night and got there just before day, and how he was so tired that he went to bed and to sleep and had just awakened and found the paper saying he was among the dead. The reporter and train crew, not being able to account for him and finding his baggage, had jumped to the conclusion he was under the wreck with the other bodies which had not, at that time, been gotten out; and how he had hastened to telephone her before she got the paper. He couldn't get out there before eleven o'clock, as he had so many things to attend to, but to let Doris know that the marriage was to come off at the appointed hour.

CHAPTER XXXII.

It was nearly nine o'clock. So much time had been lost. It seemed as if every one wanted to help her dress. Such laughing and such tears. All were weeping for joy. They rubbed and rubbed, put on the vanishing cream and rubbed her face again, and powdered and powdered to drive away the traces of tears and sorrow. One hunted her shoes, another hunted her gloves. Doris would rather have been left alone, but she would not take the pleasure away from them. She felt like she never would get dressed with so many standing around and confusing her. Poor Janet, she was left in the shade, but she was smiling and happy.

About ten-thirty they pronounced her dressed. Each one stood off and viewed her. She certainly did look beautiful in the dark blue traveling suit, with accessories to match, her hair done in a lovely coil on the top of her head. Each one had to hug and kiss her and give all sorts of parting instructions. Finally, telling her she must hurry on down to the parlor, where a big fire was waiting, and that they would not intrude on her any more, but to rest assured that they were going to be peeping from behind the curtains in the front bedroom, for, of course,

they must get a glimpse of him—they left her. She had to smile at their parting words.

Little Geraldine, dressed in beautiful white, except her cap and cloak, and who had become worn out with the excitement, was carried down and placed on the parlor davenport, where she at once fell asleep.

Janet, with hat and cloak on, fully dressed for traveling, was anxiously waiting downstairs to get a first peep at John.

The automobile trunk, bags and suit cases were packed and strapped in the hall below.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Doris, with hat, furs and gloves in hand, took a last look around the rooms and, with a catch in her throat, went below to the parlor. She closed the door. She and Geraldine were alone in the room. Across the way came the strains of "I Love You Truly." It was only a few minutes until eleven, yet she felt like the hour would never come. She longed to look out the window, yet she dared not.

The door is softly, oh, so softly opened and closed. "Janet," Doris questioned without turning her head.

"My darling!" Eugene breathed in one glad cry and they were in each others' arms. A kiss! Such a kiss! Not the passionate kiss of young lovers, but the long, lingering kiss that comes to those who have suffered, who are afraid the other will take wings and fly; the kiss that is given when hearts are so full they want to cry. After a long, long time he released one arm, moved over to the big chair drawn close to the fire, drew her down on one of his knees and, with one arm around her waist, murmured softly:

"This is no time for conventionalities. In a few minutes you will be mine to have and to

hold forever. I cannot bear to let you out of my arms for a second." She yielded willingly, and allowed her head to be drawn to his breast, where they whispered loving words that will not be written, but which can be imagined.

"I was a little late," he apologized, "but when you see that brand new, great big, beautiful seven-pasenger car, fully equipped with all luxuries necessary to make a long tour, you will forgive me," he continued. Here he told her about the wreck and how that delayed him in getting his baggage.

"I had to do some rushing around to get that car ready for us to leave here this morning. The garage man has promised to have it here by 11:30, and, in the meantime, he is going to send another car for us to go to the minister. While we are absent, John and Janet can get the baggage loaded," he said, his face wreathed in smiles.

"You're doing all this for me?" she questioned, with tears of gratitude in her eyes.

"Yes, and that isn't all," he smilingly answered as he continued: "Do you remember my telling you about a family by the name of Lee, living a few miles south of here?" he questioned.

"Yes," she answered.

"We are going to stop there and have them play for us. They will be so glad to see us."

"Yes. We must stop with them. I want to hear those boys play," she assentingly answered.

He continued: "When we leave Mr. Lee's we are going on down into Florida, first to Jacksonville, then to St. Augustine and on—on—south where the orange blossoms grow, and if you like we will make that state our home, and as the old adage runs: 'Live happily ever after.'"

They smiled, and Doris bent and kissed him ever so tenderly on the lips. Geraldine, rousing, uttered a little sigh, turned over and went back to sleep. Eugene jumped, almost precipitating Doris on the floor.

"What was that?" he exclaimed.

"The baby," Doris said with a smile, as they arose.

"Why bless my soul if I hadn't forgotten her," he spoke in surprise as he advanced to the couch, which was in a dark corner of the room.

Doris, noticing how the time was passing, hastily began putting on her hat, veil, gloves and furs. Eugene, with head bowed, still stood contemplating Geraldine. Was this sweet, little brown-eyed, dark-haired baby girl Doris's? Could that be possible? He gently lifted one of her little hands, examined each little finger caressingly. Doris, divining his thoughts, quietly advanced to his side, a smile trembling on her lips.

Placing his arms around her waist and pressing his lips to hers, he gently said: "Doris, never grieve for her. She is mine now, and by rights should have been mine from the beginning. There will never be any difference between the love I have for her and the love I shall have for our very own; for, you know," he said with a smile, "we must have six big, strapping boys like the Lee boys."

Such love, such trust, such happiness as shone in her eyes as he gently pressed her to his breast.

"I feel that God was not in my first marriage," she said brokenly; then continued: "But I want Him in this one. Eugene, let us kneel down together and ask God to bless the union of our hearts and our lives."

(THE END.)

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